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Star Slammers

by
WALTER SIMONSON

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2nd EDITION

A MARVEL GRAPHIC NOVEL

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by
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a Behry Scan

MOSTLY, I REMEMBER THE BUGS. THEY WERE ALWAYS BAD AROUND THE CITADEL, BUT SPRAYIN' KEPT 'EM DOWN. 'COURSE, WHEN YOU'RE SURROUNDED, THE FLITTERS JUST KEEP BREEDIN' IN THE SWAMPS AND THE CORPSES AND THERE'S NOTHIN' YOU CAN DO.
SO WE STAYED BUSY SWATTIN' 'EM, HOLDIN' ON AND WAITIN' FOR THE SLAMMERS.
I HAD GOOD ODDS THAT THERE'D BE LESS 'N FIFTY OF 'EM.
YOU'RE CRAZY, SPENCE!
MAYBE THE SLAMMERS ARE DAMN GOOD. MAYBE THE CITADEL DID GET WORD TO 'EM.
MAYBE THEY'LL EVEN SHOW UP!
BUT IF THERE'S LESS 'N A HUNDRED, WE MIGHT AS WELL JUMP OVER THE WALL RIGHT NOW!

THE SKRIKS ARE NO PUSH-OVERS. EVEN IF THEY ONLY HAVE ONE GUY TO A CAMP-FIRE. WE'RE STILL IN BIG TROUBLE.
I HADDA ADMIT, SLINGER WAS RIGHT. WE WERE IN BIG TROUBLE.
I FELL ASLEEP THINKIN' ABOUT WELSHIN' ON MY BETS.
THE DAWN CAME UP LIKE THUNDER!
KROW!
WHOOOM!

BE-YOW
WHUMP WHUMP
PAKKA PAKKA PAKKA
WHOUM
TAKKA TAKKA
BANG
...AND WHEN IT GOT LIGHT ENOUGH...
...I COULD SEE WE WERE GONNA HAVE A LOT MORE FLITTERS IN A FEW DAYS.

I ALSO SAW THAT I WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE SLAMMERS.
THERE WERE LESS THAN FIFTY OF 'EM.
A LOT LESS.

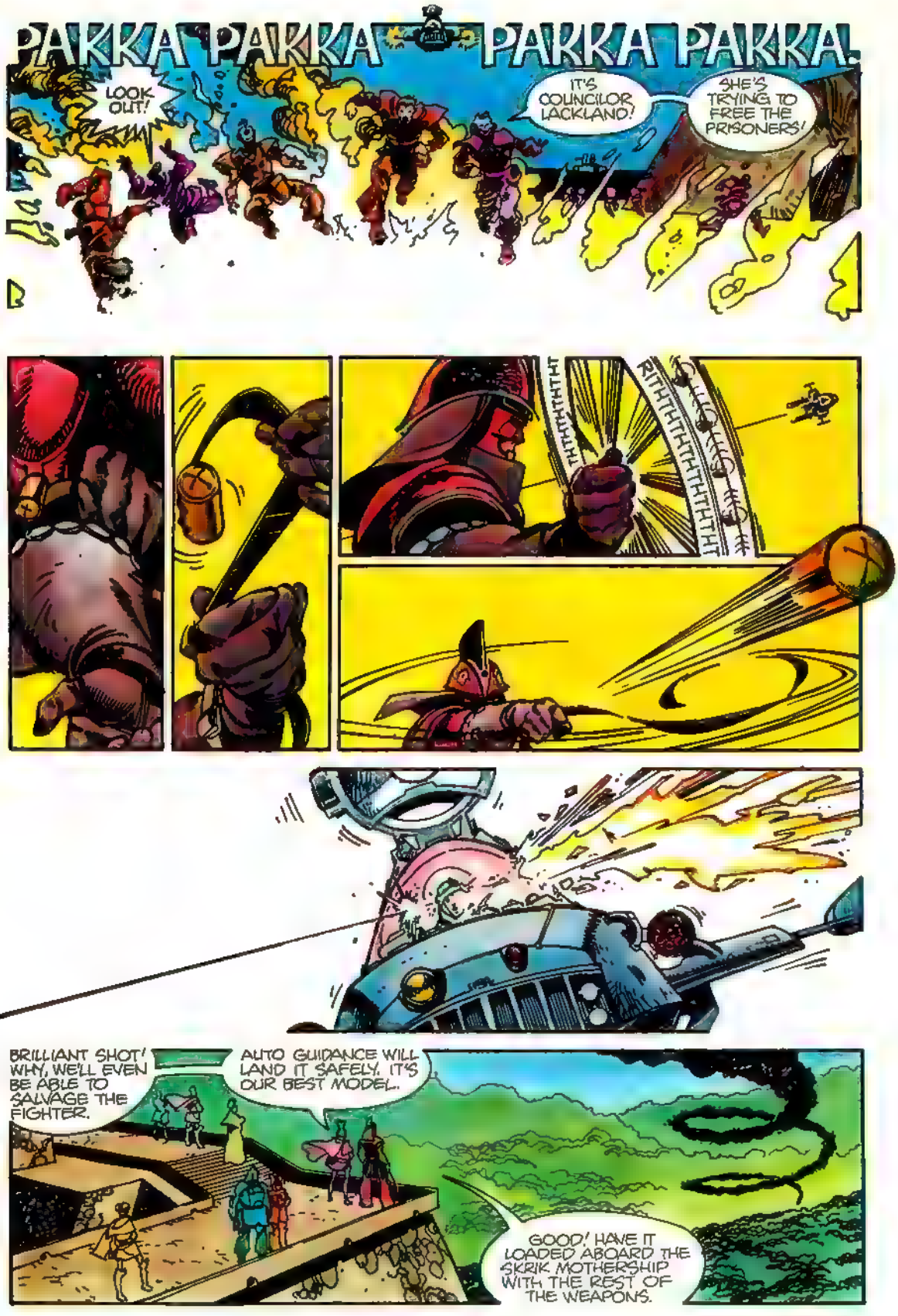
I GUESS THEY DIDN'T NEED ANYMORE.
KLANG KLANG
OPEN UP!
GRO ONN GG!!!!
WELCOME. THE PRINCES OF THE CITADEL GREET HER MIGHTY RESCUERS... THE STAR SLAMMERS. THE CITY IS Y....
WE'LL SKIP THE FORMAL-ITIES.
THE SKRIK'S ARE GONE, NOT FORGOT-TEN. THEY'LL BE BACK, BUT WE NEED A BREAK OUR-SELVES.
EVERYTHING THE CITADEL HAS TO OFFER IS YOURS. SOME FOOD? DRINK? WOMEN? MEN? WE HAVE THE FINEST DIVERSIONS...
THERE ISN'T TIME. NO WONDER YOU PEOPLE DON'T WIN ANY FIGHTS.
SEE TO IT THAT THE SPOILS OF BATTLE ARE GATHERED AC-CORDING TO OUR AGREEMENT. AND SHOW US TO OUR QUARTERS. WE WILL REST NOW.
AS YOU DESIRE.

ZZZZZZ
CREEK
PLEASE. DO NOTHING RASH.
SLAMMERS ARE NEVER RASH--UNLIKE OUR MIDNIGHT VISITOR.
YOU'RE ONE OF THE OFFICIALS WE SAW THIS AFTERNOON.
IS THIS AN OFFICIAL VISIT?
PERHAPS.
WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED TO LEARN THAT THE CITY FATHERS PLAN TO BETRAY YOU?
INDEED?
THEY WILL SLAY YOU AS SOON AS YOU HAVE WON THE WAR FOR THEM.
I TAKE IT YOU'RE HERE TO SUGGEST AN ALTERNATIVE?
THE SKRIKS ARE HEAVILY ARMED. YOU CAUGHT THEM BY SURPRISE BUT WHEN THEY RETURN, THEY WILL SURELY WIN.
YET THEY WILL BE GENEROUS IN VICTORY IF YOU AID THEM.
MANY LIVES COULD BE SPARED.
AND PROLONGING THE BATTLE IS SO FUTILE.

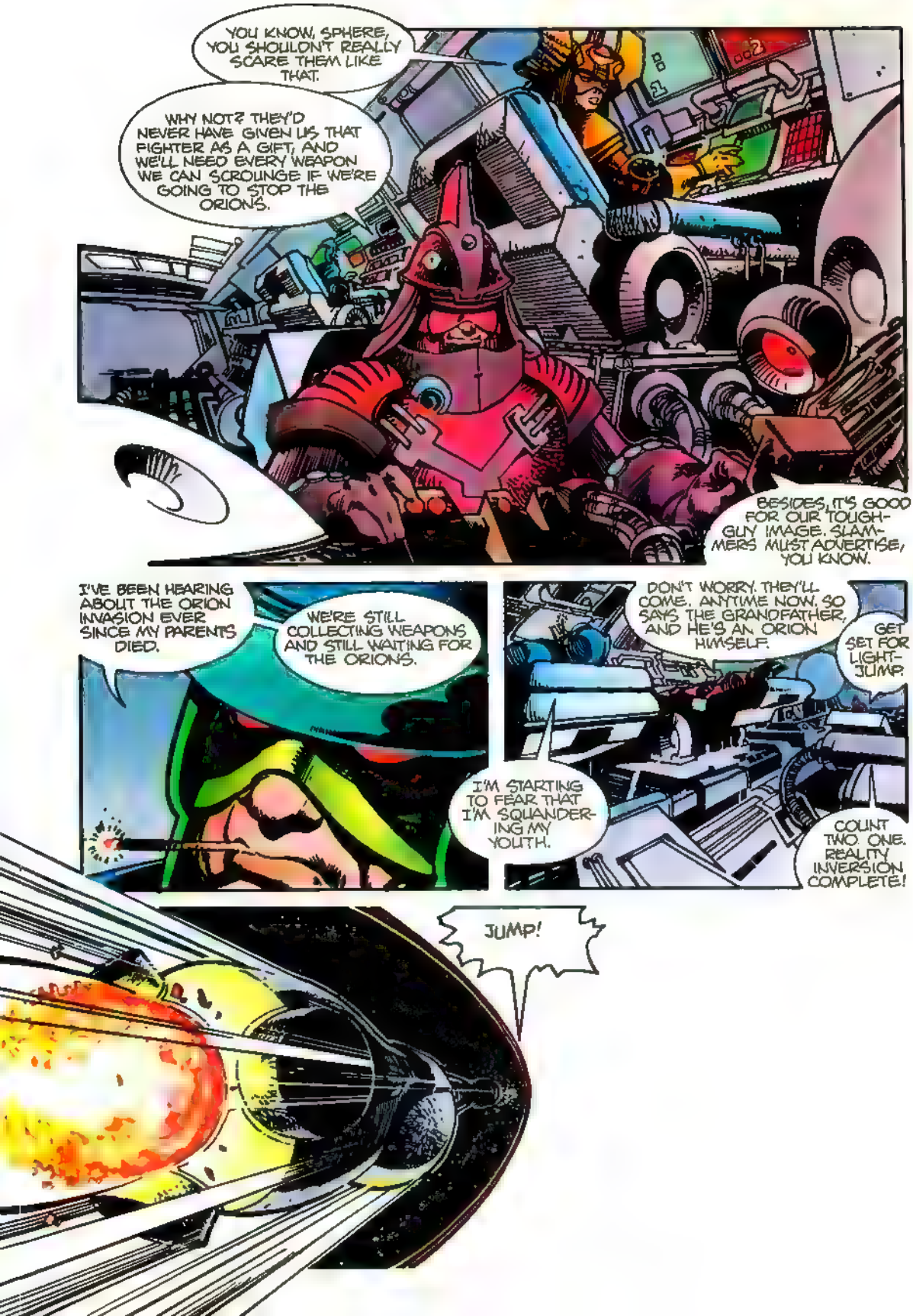
"TONIGHT, THE SKRIKS WILL BE REGROUPING AT THEIR MOTHERSHIP BEYOND THE IMPASSABLE SWAMPS, READYING THEMSELVES FOR THE FINAL ASSAULT.
"YOU COULD BE THEIR KEY TO VICTORY."
THE NIGHT WEARS ON WITHOUT WORD.
DO YOU THINK THE SLAMMERS WILL CHANGE SIDES?
IF WE'RE GOING TO TAKE THE CITADEL, THEY'LL HAVE TO. WE LOST NEARLY A THIRD OF OUR FORCES LAST NIGHT, AND THE SURVIVORS ARE SCARED.
MOST OF THEM ARE BELOW, TANKING UP ON HOK-DREAMS...OR WORSE.
LET'S HOPE LACKLAND CAN PERSUADE THE SLAMMERS TO OUR POINT OF VIEW.
SUPPOSE SHE DOES.
WILL WE HAVE TO KILL THEM AFTER WE WIN, TO KEEP THE CITADEL'S TREASURE?
YOU MIGHT.
BUT YOU WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO.
HUH?

CAPTAIN! A SHIP'S APPROACHING THE CITADEL FROM THE SWAMPS.
SHE'S TAKING NO EVASIVE ACTION!
SHE'S.. SIR! SHE'S LANDING!
IT'S THE SKRIKS' MOTHER-SHIP!
VAROOSH!
ATTENTION. THE SHIP. YOU ARE SURROUNDED. ANY HOSTILE ACT WILL BE MET WITH APPROPRIATE...
LET'S NOT GET CRAZY, EVERYBODY. THE WAR'S OVER. WE'VE CAPTURED THE BAD GUYS!
HUSTLE OVER TO THE LANDING BAY AND PREPARE TO RECEIVE THE PRISONERS.

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S OVER! HOW DID YOU CROSS THE SWAMPS WITHOUT BEING DETECTED?
CAREFULLY.
NOBODY WAS LOOKING FOR US, AND MOST OF THE SKRIKS WERE PRETTY STONED.
EVEN THE PERIMETER GUARDS.
WE JUST LOCKED THEM UP IN THEIR OWN SHIP!
BUT THERE IS SOMETHING ELSE YOU SHOULD KNOW.
IT'S ABOUT ONE OF YOUR CITY OFFICIALS
HEY, LEGGO SHE'S GETTING AWAY.
I DON'T THINK SHE'LL GO TOO FAR.
YEAH, BUT...
SSHHH, HERE SHE COMES NOW.
ROARRR!


PAKKA PAKKA PAKKA PAKKA!
LOOK OUT!
IT'S COUNCILOR LACKLAND!
SHE'S TRYING TO FREE THE PRISONERS!
BRILLIANT SHOT! WHY, WE'LL EVEN BE ABLE TO SALVAGE THE FIGHTER.
AUTO GUIDANCE WILL LAND IT SAFELY. IT'S OUR BEST MODEL.
GOOD! HAVE IT LOADED ABOARD THE SKRIK MOTHERSHIP WITH THE REST OF THE WEAPONS.

WHAT?
OUR CONTRACT AWARDS US THE SPOILS OF WAR, REMEMBER?
WEAPONS OF THE ENEMY.
SHE WAS AN ENEMY, WASN'T SHE?
BUT.. BUT...
EXACTLY. I KNEW YOU'D BE REASONABLE.
AND SO
BROTHER, YOU GUYS ARE TAKING ALONG ENOUGH HARDWARE TO START YOUR OWN WAR.
THAT'S RIGHT.
OH. UH...
HEH.. UH...GOOD LUCK
THANKS.
DON'T HURRY BACK


YOU KNOW, SPHERE, YOU SHOULDN'T REALLY SCARE THEM LIKE THAT.
WHY NOT? THEY'D NEVER HAVE GIVEN US THAT FIGHTER AS A GIFT, AND WE'LL NEED EVERY WEAPON WE CAN SCROUNGE IF WE'RE GOING TO STOP THE ORIONS.
BESIDES, IT'S GOOD FOR OUR TOUGH-GUY IMAGE. SLAMMERS MUST ADVERTISE, YOU KNOW.
I'VE BEEN HEARING ABOUT THE ORION INVASION EVER SINCE MY PARENTS DIED.
WE'RE STILL COLLECTING WEAPONS AND STILL WAITING FOR THE ORIONS.
DON'T WORRY. THEY'LL COME. ANYTIME NOW. SO SAYS THE GRANDFATHER, AND HE'S AN ORION HIMSELF.
GET SET FOR LIGHT-JUMP.
I'M STARTING TO FEAR THAT I'M SQUANDERING MY YOUTH.
COUNT TWO. ONE. REALITY INVERSION COMPLETE!
JUMP!

MIGHT AS WELL RELAX. WE WON'T BE DROPPING OUT OF JUMPSPACE FOR A WHILE.
LET'S CHECK OUT THE LARDER.
MAYBE WE CAN FIND SOMETHING THERE TO CONVINCE LITTLE ETHON THAT HE ISN'T WASTING HIS TIME.
THAT WON'T BE DIFFICULT. BUT I DO WONDER IF THE GRANDFATHER ISN'T WASTING HIS SPHERE?
IS THE SILVERMIND REAL?
I CAN'T SAY.
BUT TO TRY TO FORGE A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE MINDS OF ALL THE SLAMMERS.
TO LASH THEIR PERCEPTIONS TOGETHER AND MAKE SENSE OUT OF EVERYTHING.
I CAN BARELY HOLD A SINGLE MINDBRIDGE WITH JALAIA NOW.
THAT'S ONE REASON WHY WE TAKE YOU CALLOW YOUTHS ALONG, ETHON. TO TEACH YOU BRIDGING'S DELICATE ART. YOU'LL SOON BE BRIDGING AS EASILY WITH SPHERE AS YOU DO WITH ME.
ALAS, JALAIA, DON'T YOU LOVE ME FOR MY BODY?
HA! WITH TALENT LIKE YOURS?
NOBODY ELSE HAS SPENT SO MUCH TIME BRIDGING WITH THE GRANDFATHER.
DRUGS, PSIONICS, DEEP-BREATHING. WE'VE TRIED THEM ALL, AND YOU...YOU'RE GOING TO BE THE DEEPEST MIND-BRIDGER OF ANY OF US.
IF YOU CAN KICK AWAY THE COBWEBS, WE MAY YET ACHIEVE THE SILVERMIND AND BEAT THE ORIONS!
I'M NOT SURE I LIKE IT.
AND I STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M DOING.

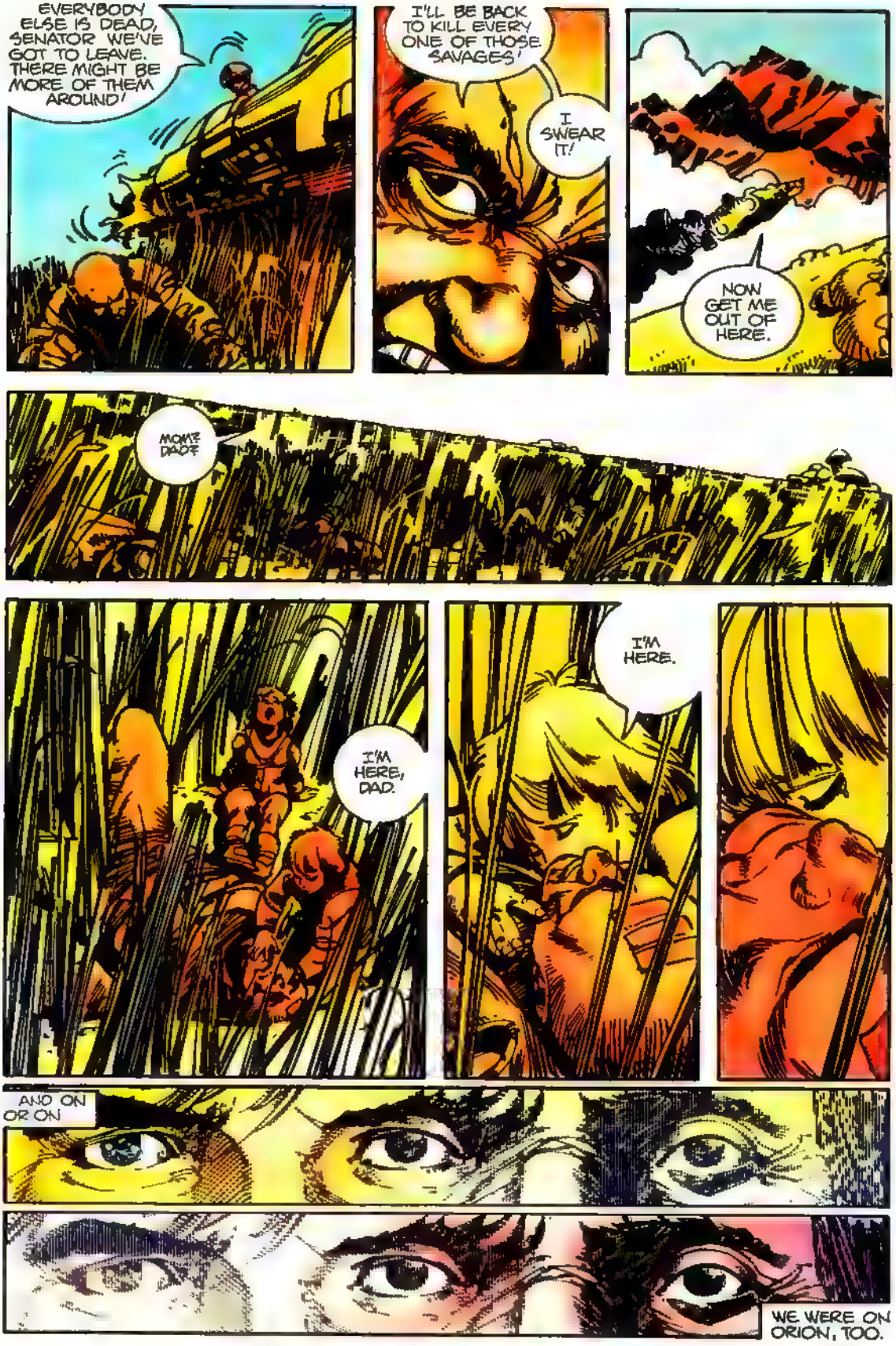
IT SCARES ME—THE LIGHTS, THE NEEDLES, THE GRANDFATHER HIMSELF!
HE'S AN ORION, A HUNTER. HE'S OLD, BUT STILL HE HUNTS.
AND MAYBE THE SILVERMIND IS THE GREATEST GAME OF ALL.
GREATER GAME EVEN THAN THE SLAMMERS ON HOMEWORLD, THOUGH THAT'S WHERE THIS HUNT BEGAN. I LEARNED THAT MUCH THE LAST TIME WE BRIDGED.
WE'RE PART OF THE SAME STORY, THE GRANDFATHER AND I.
THE YEARS FELL AWAY.
WE BECAME CHILDREN TOGETHER AND WERE HUNTED. WE SHARED MINDS AND HUNTED TOGETHER.

AND I SAW AGAIN THE FIELDS OF MY CHILDHOOD...
...AND MY PARENTS.
ANOTHER TWENTY MINUTES AND WE'LL REACH COVER.
I LIKE THE SKY, DAD. IT'S BLUE.
IT IS DANGER, LITTLE ETHON. ALWAYS RE-MEMBER-- THE SKY IS DEATH.
TOPOLK, LISTEN. CAN YOU--?
"I HEAR IT, CARISSA. THE HUNTERS HAVE FOUND US."
SSSSSSSSHH

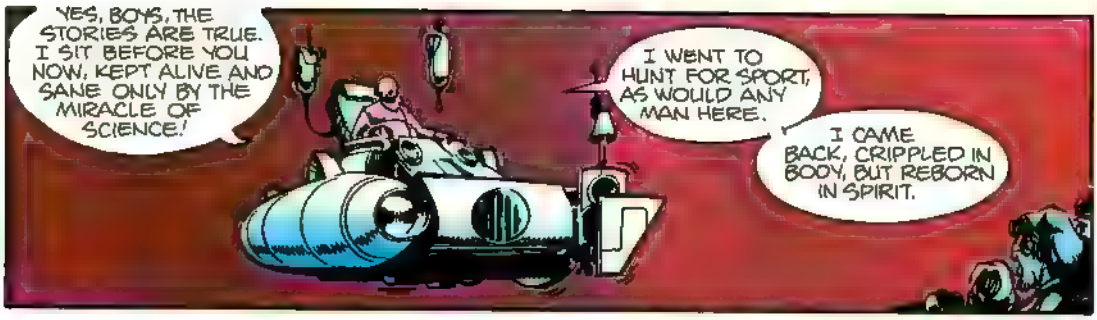
THE SKY IS AGAINST US, ETHON.
HIDE YOURSELF AND YOUR SISTER. YOUR MOTHER AND I WILL LURE IT AWAY.
DAD?
GOT A TARGET, SENATOR. THE QUAKE DID BRING 'EM OUT.
THERE.
HOLD HER STEADY, THURSDAY, WHILE I LOAD.
MARVELOUS, ISN'T IT, FOLKS, HOW THE GUIDES CAN FLUSH OUT THE GAME SO EASILY.
LITTLE DID OUR ANCESTORS KNOW THEY WERE CREATING THE GREATEST SPORT OF ALL BACK WHEN THEY USED TO DUMP UNDESIRABLES ON THIS FORSAKEN WORLD.
DON'T WORRY, LADIES I'VE GOT THEM.
KRAK KRAK
OOH, CAN I HAVE THE TEETH?
CARISSA!
oh!
PIOK
ZTH-
ZTH-
CARISSA...

SO, TONIGHT WE WILL SLEEP TOGETHER BENEATH THE SKY, DARLING...
...BUT WE WILL NOT SLEEP ALONE!
THERE THEY ARE.
LOOKS LIKE YOU GOT ONE OF THE SAVAGES, SENATOKKK...!
PULL UP! PULL UP! HE'S--!
PLANNNG!
UH-OH.
OH GOD, MY LEGS! THEY HURT! THEY HURT!
HURRY! GET THIS OFF ME BEFORE..
WHAMM!

GET ME LOOSE! GET ME LOOSE!
THAKT!
NOT TO WORRY, SENATOR. I'VE GOT HIM NOW!
PAUM
SNAPT!
DAMN!
CLICK!
THAM THAM THAM THAM THAM

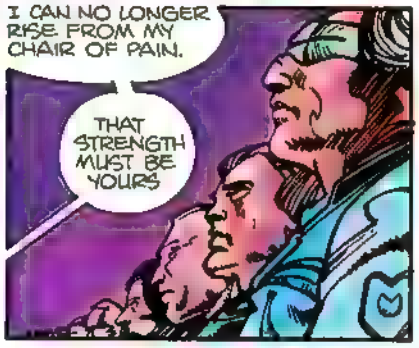

EVERYBODY ELSE IS DEAD, SENATOR WE'VE GOT TO LEAVE. THERE MIGHT BE MORE OF THEM AROUND!
I'LL BE BACK TO KILL EVERY ONE OF THOSE SAVAGES!
I SWEAR IT!
NOW GET ME OUT OF HERE.
MOM? DAD?
I'M HERE, DAD.
I'M HERE.
AND ON OR ON
WE WERE ON ORION, TOO.

WE SAW THE HALLS OF GOVERNMENT WHERE THE GRANDFATHER LISTENED AS A DECISION WAS REACHED SO LONG AGO.
WILL THE DELEGATES PLEASE BE SEATED.
THIS EMERGENCY SESSION OF THE SENATE IS ABOUT TO CONVENE.
I'D BETTER GET TO MY SEAT EXCUSE ME, MANDERIN.
CERTAINLY, GALARIUS.
PITY GALARIUS'LL NEVER RISE TO THE TOP, BUT YOU CAN'T CHOOSE YOUR ANCESTORS TOO CAREFULLY.
I UNDERSTAND HE'S ACTUALLY PROUD OF THE CONNECTION. YET THE EMPEROR FAVORS HIM.
EVEN KRELLIK LIKES HIM.
YOUR EXCELLENCIES, RUMORS ARE RAMPANT CONCERNING THE RECENT HUNTING PARTY CATASTROPHE. SAVAGES ARMED AND DANGEROUS, MEN AND WOMEN BRUTALLY SLAIN.
WE ARE HERE TO LEARN THE TRUTH OF THIS AFFAIR AND TO ARRANGE MATTERS TO PREVENT ITS FUTURE RECURRENCE.
EXCELLENCIES, THE MAN WHO LIVED IT ALL, AND CAN TELL US WHAT TO DO, THE RIGHT HONORABLE SENATOR KRELLIK.
LOOK! HE'S LAMED! THE STORIES ARE TRUE!

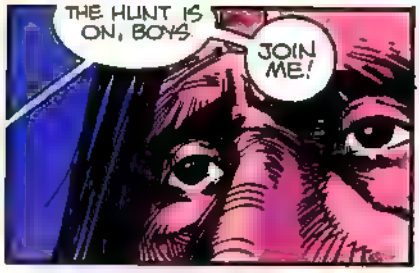

YES, BOYS, THE STORIES ARE TRUE. I SIT BEFORE YOU NOW, KEPT ALIVE AND SANE ONLY BY THE MIRACLE OF SCIENCE!
I WENT TO HUNT FOR SPORT, AS WOULD ANY MAN HERE.
I CAME BACK, CRIPPLED IN BODY, BUT REBORN IN SPIRIT.

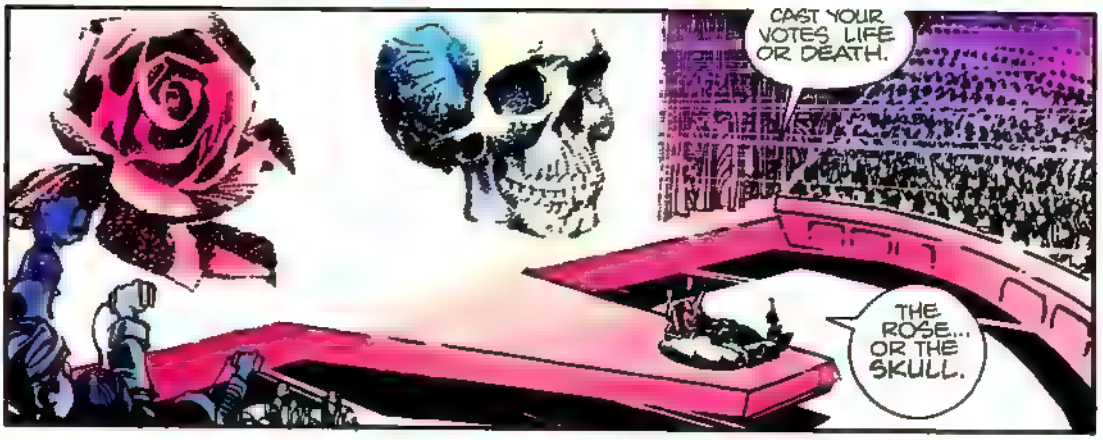
I SAW THE FINEST HUNTERS, SLAIN BY A SINGLE MAN, THE LIKES OF WHOM WE'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE.
WE'VE NEW NEIGHBORS, BOYS. DANGEROUS ONES. WHOEVER HEARD OF SAVAGES RISING TO SLAY THE HUNTERS OF ORION?
THERE'S A NEW BREED OF EXILE, TREACHEROUSLY HIDDEN UNTIL NOW FROM OUR SPIES AND SATELLITES.

A DECEITFUL RACE READY TO SLAY US IF WE GIVE THEM THE CHANCE
BUT WE MUST STRIKE FIRST.

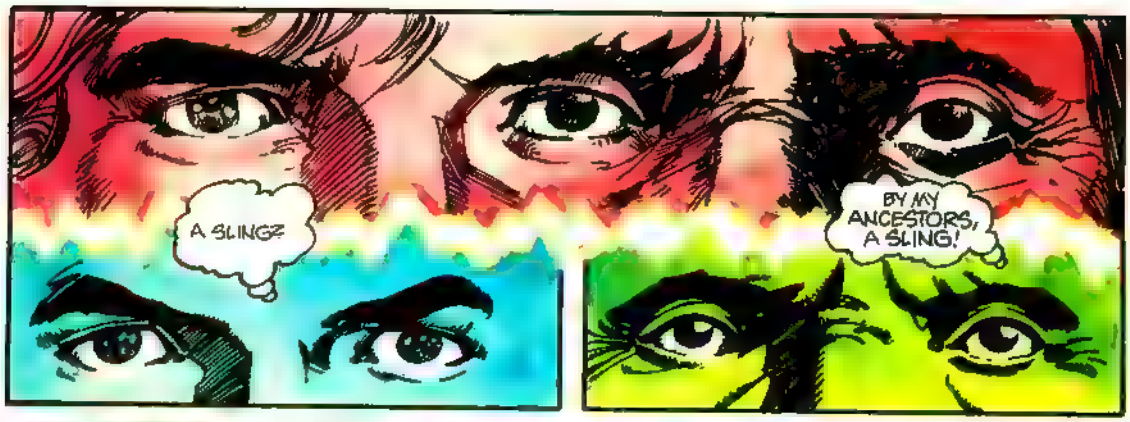

I CAN NO LONGER RISE FROM MY CHAIR OF PAIN.
THAT STRENGTH MUST BE YOURS

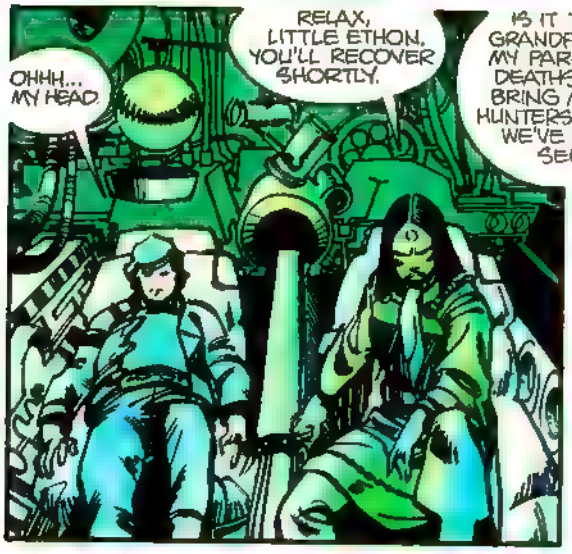
YOU CAN GIVE ME THE WEAPONS TO SAVE OUR PEOPLE


THE HUNT IS ON, BOYS
JOIN ME!


CAST YOUR VOTES LIFE OR DEATH.
THE ROSE... OR THE SKULL.

"AND WE SEE THE TOTEM THAT WILL DECIDE OUR FATE."
WELL SPOKEN, BOYS! WE WILL RE-MAKE THE EXILES' PLANET IN A NEWER, MORE CONGENIAL IMAGE.
WHY IS IT, GALARIUS, I CAN NEVER PER-SUADE YOU TO DO THE RIGHT THING?
SANCTION-ING GENO-CIDE, YOU MEAN?
THINK OF IT RATHER AS SUPPORTING A WAY OF LIFE.
THE GOVERNMENT'S INVESTED HEAVILY IN THE HUNTS. THERE ISN'T MUCH BREAD, WE'VE GOT TO PROVIDE THE CIRCUSES
AND WE CAN'T AFFORD TO HAVE A RACE OF SAVAGES MAKING FOOLS OF US ON NATIONAL TV
WHICH IS EXACTLY WHAT WOULD'VE HAPPENED IF THIS FIASCO HAD BEEN AIRED.
AS IT IS, WE HAD A LOT OF DIFFICULTY DESTROY-ING THOSE FILMS.
THE NETWORK WAS SCREAMING.
BUT IT MAY TURN OUT FOR THE BEST.
NOW WE'LL HAVE A HUNT TO FOCUS ON FOR YEARS TO COME.
ARE THEY REALLY SO DANGEROUS?
WORSE THAN YOU CAN IMAGINE. WE WERE FIGHT-ING A SINGLE ADULT MALE...
...ARMED WITH A LOUSY SLING!
THAT'S WHY WE ATE THE FILMS.
IMAGINE SEEING THE MIGHTY HUNT-ERS LAID LOW BY A SLING!
UNTHINKABLE!
BEST TO MAKE A FRESH START!
WE CAN ALWAYS RESEED THE PLANET LATER
Thipp
A SLING?

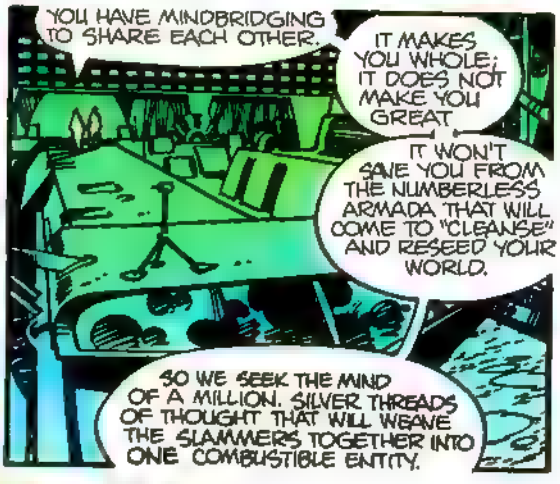

A SLING?
BY MY ANCESTORS, A SLING!

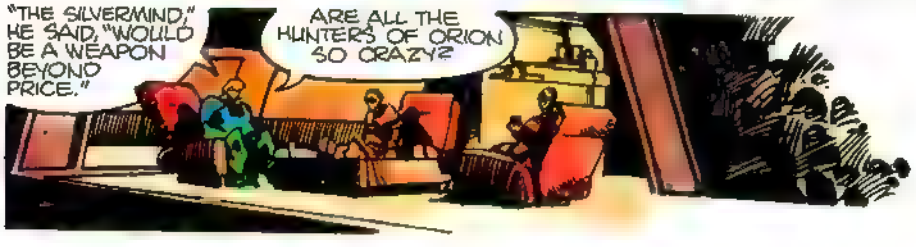

OHHH... MY HEAD.
RELAX, LITTLE ETHON. YOU'LL RECOVER SHORTLY.

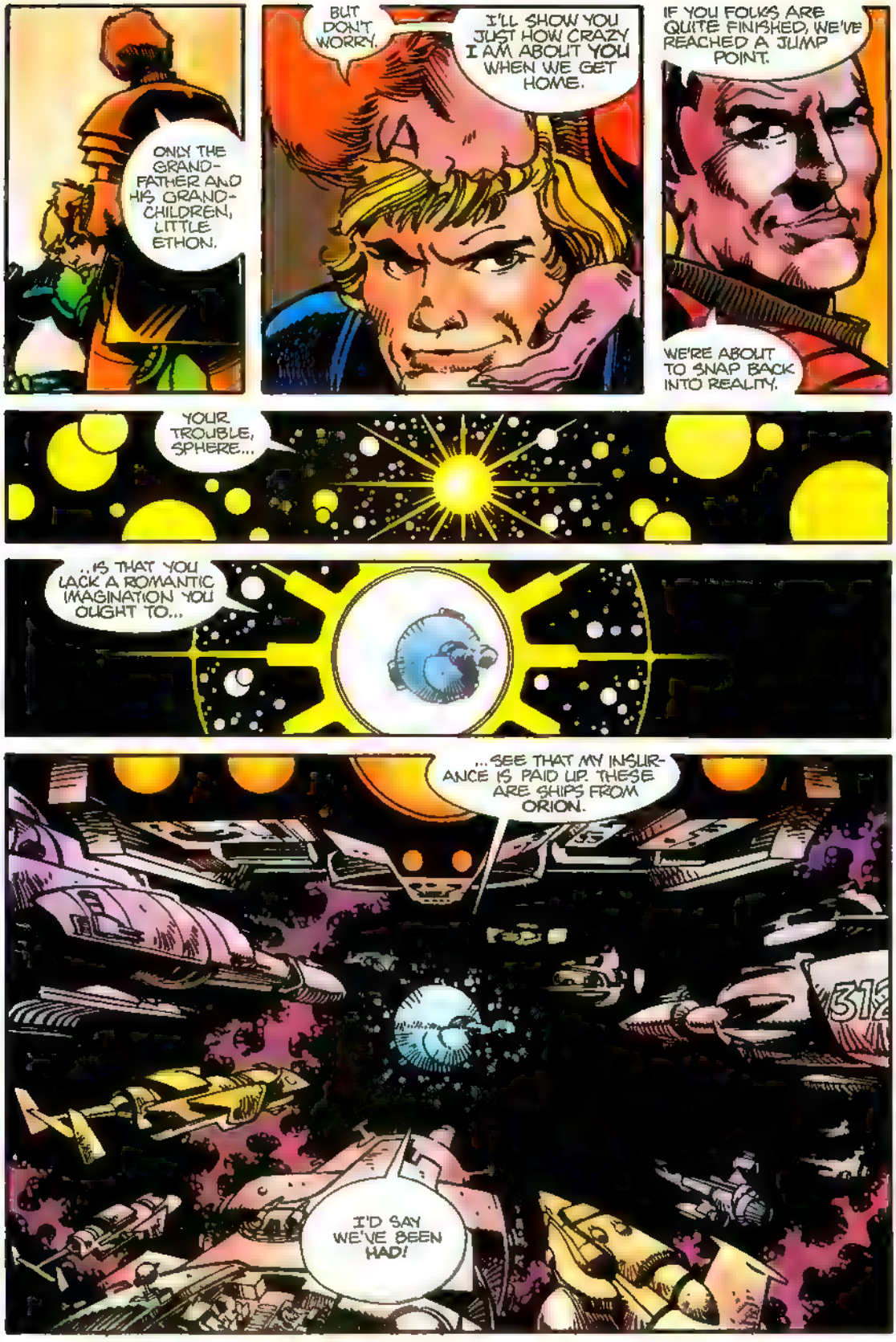
IS IT TRUE, GRANDFATHER? MY PARENTS' DEATHS WILL BRING MORE HUNTERS THAN WE'VE EVER SEEN?
IT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED SOMETIME.

TALENT LIKE YOUR FATHER'S WOULD NOT HAVE STAYED HIDDEN FOREVER.
AND HE WAS ONLY ONE OF MANY.

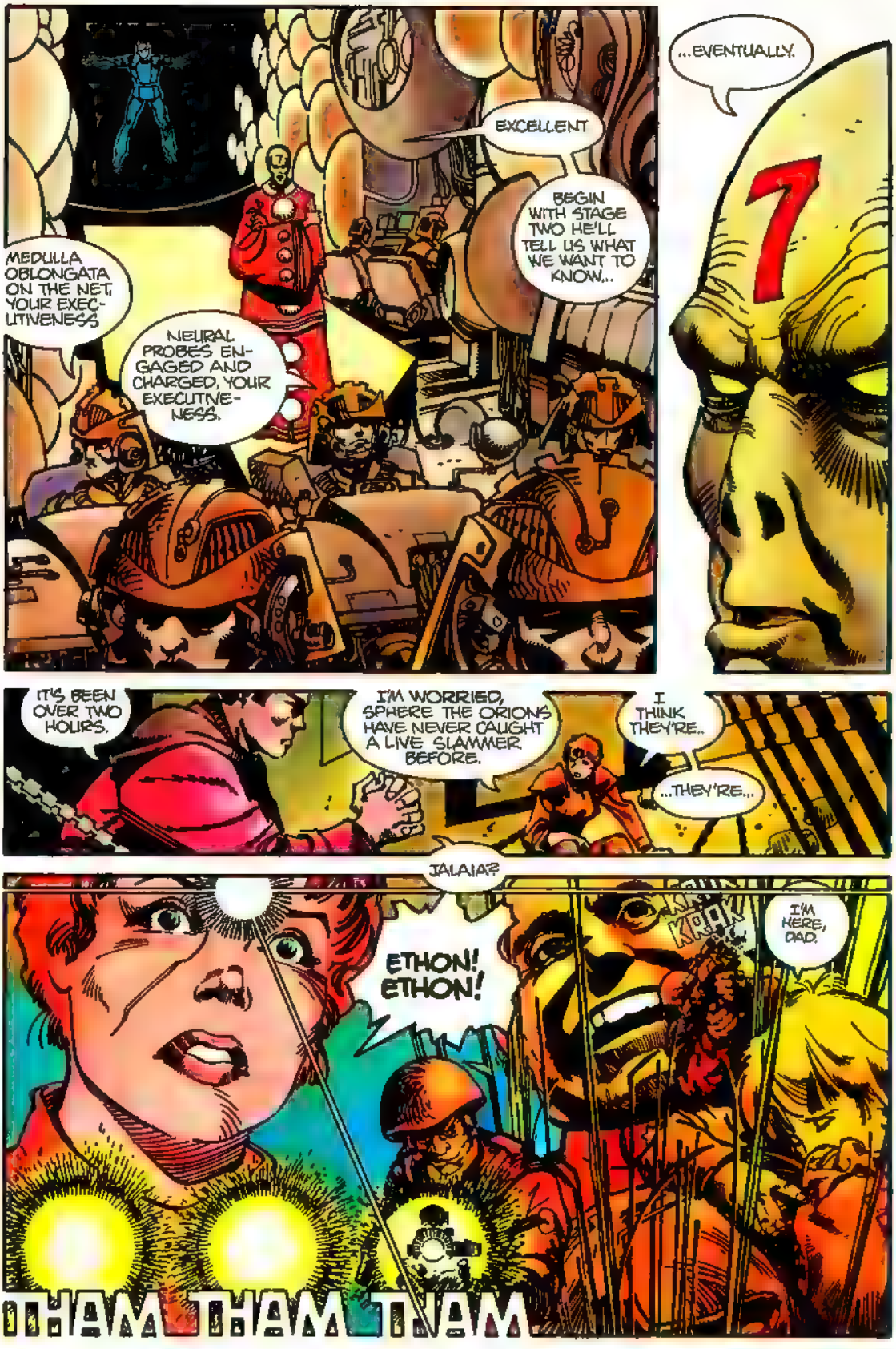
BUT WHY SEEK OUT THE SILVERMIND? IF WE'RE SUCH GOOD FIGHTERS, WHY NOT JUST FIGHT?
YOU HAVE THE TRUE STRENGTH OF WARRIORS.
BECAUSE THE HUNTERS WOULD DEVOUR YOU AS AN ARMY OF ANTS DEVOURS THE HART.
IT IS NOT ENOUGH.


YOU HAVE MINDBRIDGING TO SHARE EACH OTHER.
IT MAKES YOU WHOLE; IT DOES NOT MAKE YOU GREAT
IT WON'T SAVE YOU FROM THE NUMBERLESS ARMADA THAT WILL COME TO "CLEANSE" AND RESEED YOUR WORLD.
SO WE SEEK THE MIND OF A MILLION. SILVER THREADS OF THOUGHT THAT WILL WEAVE THE SLAMMERS TOGETHER INTO ONE COMBUSTIBLE ENTITY.


"THE SILVERMIND," HE SAID, "WOULD BE A WEAPON BEYOND PRICE."
ARE ALL THE HUNTERS OF ORION SO CRAZY?


ONLY THE GRAND-FATHER AND HIS GRAND-CHILDREN, LITTLE ETHON.
BUT DON'T WORRY.
I'LL SHOW YOU JUST HOW CRAZY I AM ABOUT YOU WHEN WE GET HOME.
IF YOU FOLKS ARE QUITE FINISHED, WE'VE REACHED A JUMP POINT.
WE'RE ABOUT TO SNAP BACK INTO REALITY.
YOUR TROUBLE, SPHERE...
...IS THAT YOU LACK A ROMANTIC IMAGINATION YOU OUGHT TO...
...SEE THAT MY INSURANCE IS PAID UP. THESE ARE SHIPS FROM ORION.
I'D SAY WE'VE BEEN HAD!

SHORTLY, IN AN ORION BRIG
I GUESS OUR RECENT EMPLOYERS WERE UNHAPPIER THAN I THOUGHT ABOUT LOSING THAT FIGHTER
YOU THINK SO?
SEEMS LIKELY. PROBABLY BROADCAST AN ALL-BAND GRUMP ABOUT IT AND THE ORIONS PICKED IT UP.
IT WOULDN'T BE HARD TO FIGURE OUT WHAT JUMP POINTS WE'D BE PASSING THROUGH RETURNING TO HOMEWORLD.
I SHOULD HAVE FORESEEN THAT NOW WE'LL HAVE TO WAIT FOR THEM TO MAKE A MISTAKE.
DON'T BLAME YOURSELF, SPHERE, NONE OF US ..
STHRAPPPT!
SYNAPSE DISRUPTOR!
I CAN HARDLY BREATHE.
OK, BOYS, THEY'RE OUT OF IT.
GRAB THE YOUNGEST.
THEY WANT TO START WITH HIM.


MEDULLA OBLONGATA ON THE NET, YOUR EXEC-UTIVENESS
NEURAL PROBES EN-GAGED AND CHARGED, YOUR EXECUTIVE-NESS.
EXCELLENT
BEGIN WITH STAGE TWO HE'LL TELL US WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW...
...EVENTUALLY.
7
IT'S BEEN OVER TWO HOURS.
I'M WORRIED, SPHERE THE ORIONS HAVE NEVER CAUGHT A LIVE SLAMMER BEFORE.
I THINK THEY'RE..
...THEY'RE...
JALAIA?
ETHON! ETHON!
KNOK KNOK
I'M HERE, DAD.
THAM THAM THAM

JALAIA! I CAN HEAR YOU!
GIVE HIM ANOTHER JOLT
STAGE SEVEN.
OH SPHERE THEY'RE TORTURING H.M.
I CAN SEE IT!
I CAN HEAR IT!
BOY, HE SURE CAN TAKE IT!
JALAIA! I HEAR IT! I CAN HEAR IT, TOO!
AREN'T YOU SUPPOSED TO BE GUARDING THE BRIG?
YEAH, BUT WITH ONLY TWO OTHER PRISONERS, WE THOUGHT WE'D WATCH.
NEVER SAW A REAL SLAMMER BEFORE.
YOU'VE ALREADY SEEN ONE TOO MANY. COME ON, JALAIA. THERE AREN'T ANY GUARDS OUTSIDE.
SHIFT TO EXTREME COMBAT REGIME. WE'RE LEAVING!

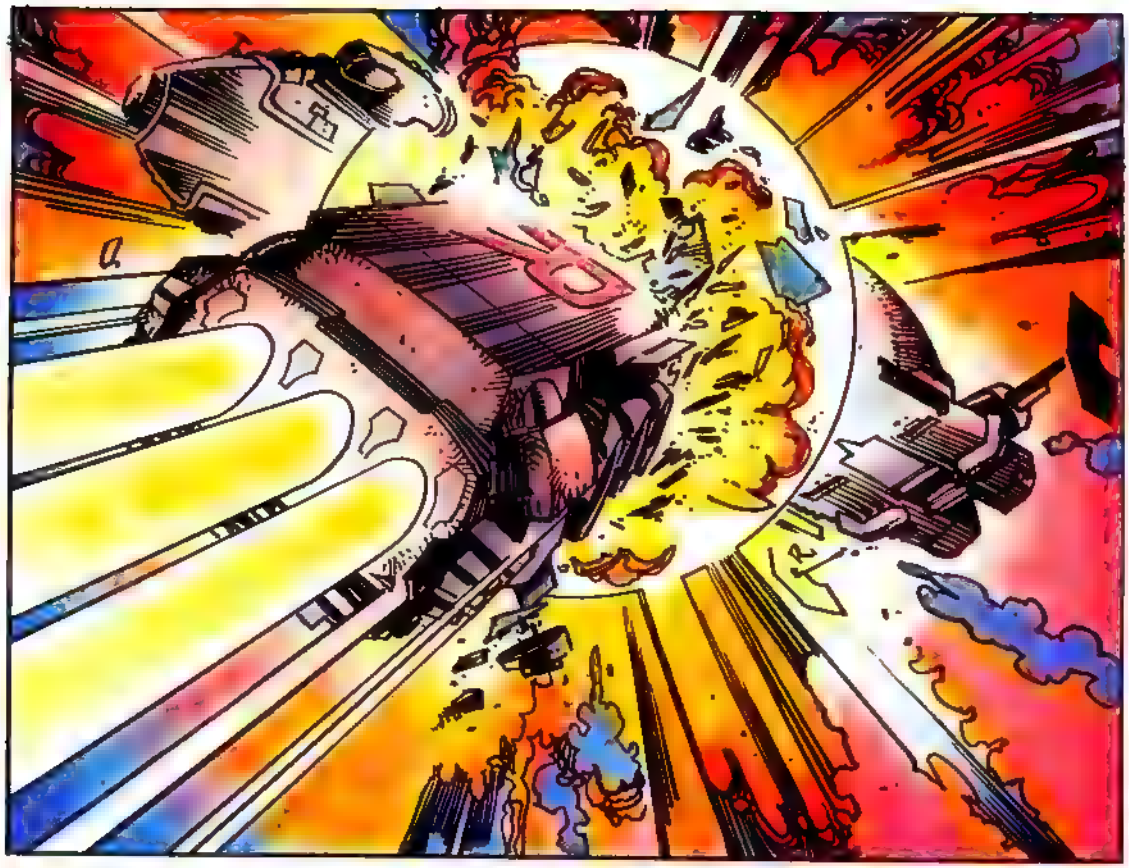
WE AWAIT YOUR ANSWER, YOUNG WARRIOR.
EVERYBODY WANTS TO KNOW ABOUT US. ALL RIGHT, I'LL TELL YOU. WE HAVE BEEN AROUND A LONG TIME, UNKNOWN TO YOU MIGHTY HUNTERS. WOULD'VE STAYED THAT WAY TOO IF YOU HADN'T CAUGHT MY FAMILY IN THE OPEN.
WE ARE DESCENDANTS OF THE EXILES! AND WE ARE THE STAR SLAMMERS!
BUT WE'VE HUNTED YOUR RACE FOR YEARS. THERE WAS NO FIGHT IN THEM.
WHEN IT WAS NECESSARY, THE OLD AND INFIRM USED TO GO OUT TO DIE AT YOUR HANDS. IT GAVE YOU SOMETHING TO DO AND KEPT THE REST OF US HIDDEN.
HMMMM. WHY THIS SUDDEN ELOQUENCE?
NOW, WE CAN'T HIDE ANY LONGER. NOW, WE'LL FIGHT LIKE HELL.
BECAUSE IT WON'T MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE. LOOK BEHIND YOU.

WHAKK!
I'VE SHUT OFF THE POWER.
HOW IS HE?
HE'S DYING, SPHERE
I SEE
STAGE 10
RATHTHT
AAGGG!

JALAIA? SPHERE? GRANDFATHER WAS RIGHT. I COULD DO IT.
I COULD MINDBRIDGE YOU WHILE YOU WERE IN YOUR CELL.
I COULD BRIDGE EVERYBODY!
DAD? I'M HERE, DAD.
I'M...
IT'S TIME TO LEAVE, JALAIA. OUR SHIP'S MOORED JUST OUTSIDE.
WE'VE GOT TO REACH HOMEWORLD AND WARN THEM THAT THE HUNTERS ARE COMING AT LAST.
AND ETHON, SPHERE?

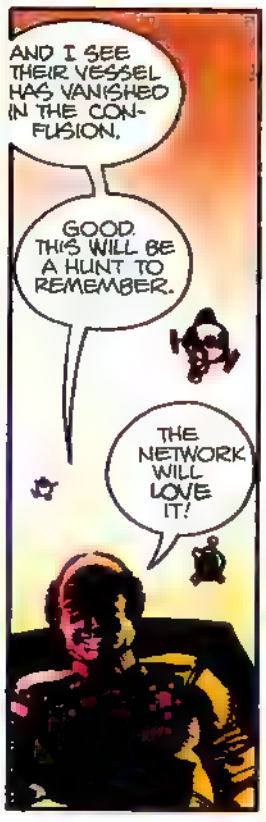
NO WARRIOR SHOULD RIDE THE FIRESTORM HOME ALONE.
I'VE SET THE CON-TROLS.
ETHON'S GOING TO BUY US THE TIME WE NEED TO ESCAPE
SLEEP WELL, WARRIOR. WE'LL NOT FORGET YOU.
LET'S GO, JALAIA.
DON'T LOOK BACK.
FSSSSSSIP!

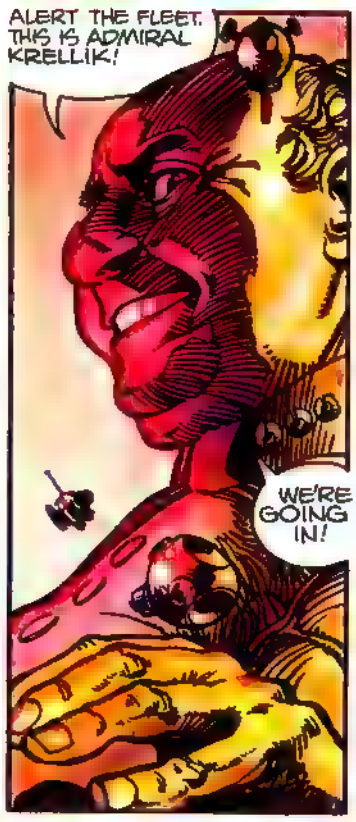
LOOKS LIKE I PICKED THE RIGHT TIME TO HIT THE JOHN.
UH-OH. THEY'VE BLOCKED THE PORTAL BEHIND THEM..
...AND THE SHIP'S STARTING TO MOVE.
I DON'T LIKE THE LOOKS OF THIS
COMMANDER, WE'RE PICKING UP AN EMERGENCY DISTRESS CALL FROM THE BRIGANTINE, RAMILLIES.
SHE'S EJECTED A LIFEBOAT.
STRANGE. I DON'T SEE ANY SIGN OF TROUBLE. SEE IF...
SHE'S ACCELERATING, HEADING THIS WAY
SHE'S COMING RIGHT FOR US! EVASIVE MANEUVERS!
RIG FOR COLLISION!

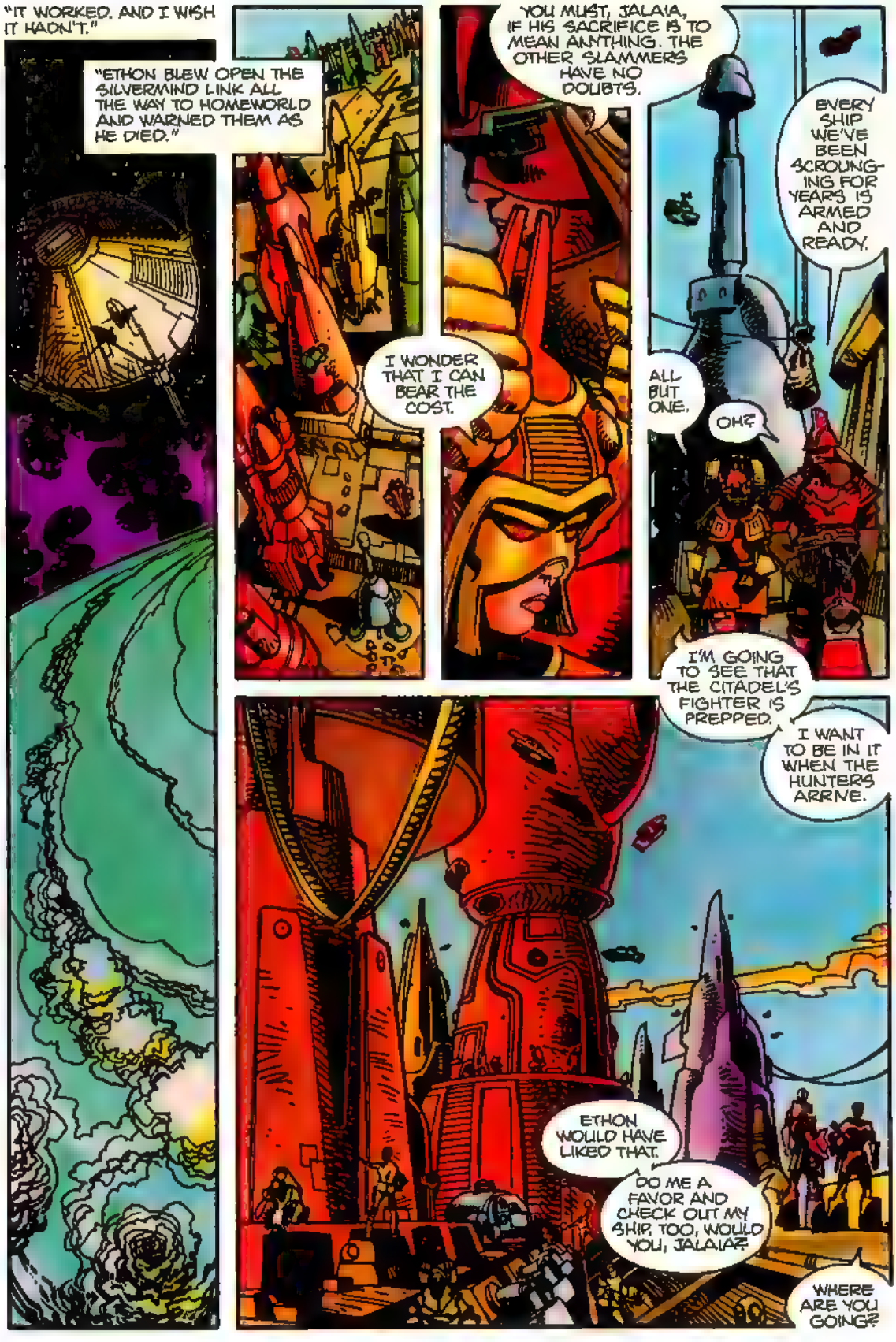


LOCATE THAT LIFEBOAT. I WANT ANY SURVIVORS BROUGHT TO ME IMMEDIATELY.

SOON...
YOU WERE RIGHT, ADMIRAL. THOSE SO-CALLED STAR SLAMMERS ARE FROM THE EXILES' WORLD.
THEIR SHIP WAS FULL OF ARMS. LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE EXPECTING US.


AND I SEE THEIR VESSEL HAS VANISHED IN THE CONFUSION.
GOOD. THIS WILL BE A HUNT TO REMEMBER.
THE NETWORK WILL LOVE IT!


ALERT THE FLEET. THIS IS ADMIRAL KRELLIK!
WE'RE GOING IN!

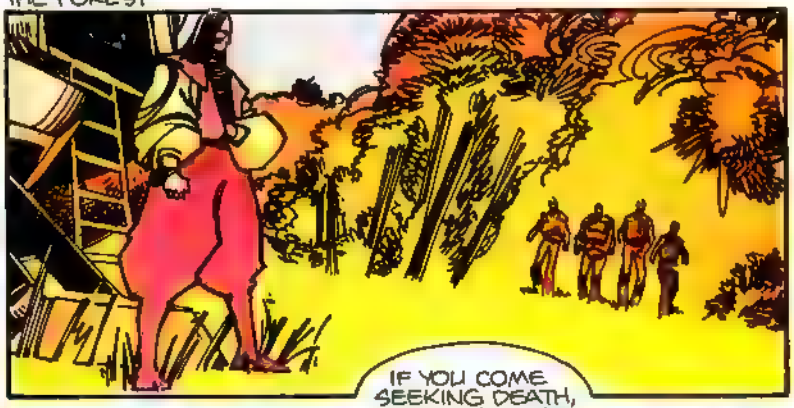

"IT WORKED. AND I WISH IT HADN'T."
"ETHON BLEW OPEN THE SILVERMIND LINK ALL THE WAY TO HOMEWORLD AND WARNED THEM AS HE DIED."
I WONDER THAT I CAN BEAR THE COST.
YOU MUST, JALAIA, IF HIS SACRIFICE IS TO MEAN ANYTHING. THE OTHER SLAMMERS HAVE NO DOUBTS.
EVERY SHIP WE'VE BEEN SCROUNGING FOR YEARS IS ARMED AND READY.
ALL BUT ONE.
OH?
I'M GOING TO SEE THAT THE CITADEL'S FIGHTER IS PREPPED.
I WANT TO BE IN IT WHEN THE HUNTERS ARRIVE.
ETHON WOULD HAVE LIKED THAT.
DO ME A FAVOR AND CHECK OUT MY SHIP, TOO, WOULD YOU, JALAIA?
WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

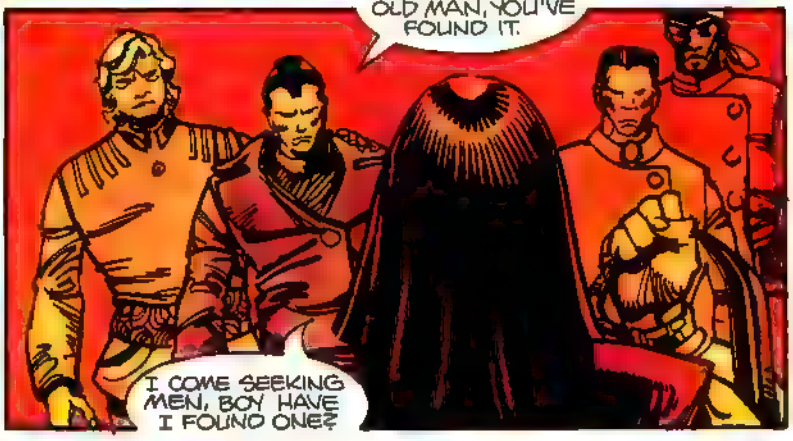
"I'VE GOT A HOUSE CALL TO MAKE."
GRANDFATHER?
COME IN, SPHERE.
THE SKY IS FALLING AT LAST, EH?
IT'S TRUE, GRAND-FATHER. JALAIA AND I HAVE SEEN IT.
I WOULD NEVER HAVE BELIEVED THERE WERE SO MANY HUNTERS. AN ARMY OF ANTS, YOU ONCE SAID.
ETHON'S DEATH WAS JUST THE BE-GINNING, SPHERE. IT'S GOING TO GET A LOT WORSE.
HOW'S JALAIA TAKING IT?

AS LONG AS WE FIGHT, SHE'LL BE OKAY.
BUT I'M WORRIED.
AND FRIGHTENED, I EXPECT. AS I WAS WHEN I FIRST LANDED HERE.
I REMEMBER IT WELL.
MY FEAR. MY ANTICIPATION.

ONLY GOVERNMENT-SANCTIONED HUNTING PARTIES WERE ALLOWED TO VISIT THIS HIDDEN WORLD. I HAD UNLOCKED ITS SECRET LOCATION, SLIPPED PAST THE SATELLITES, AND LANDED NEAR A PARTY OF "SAVAGES."

"I CAN STILL SEE YOUR GRIM YOUNG FACE ADVANCING OUT OF THE FOREST."



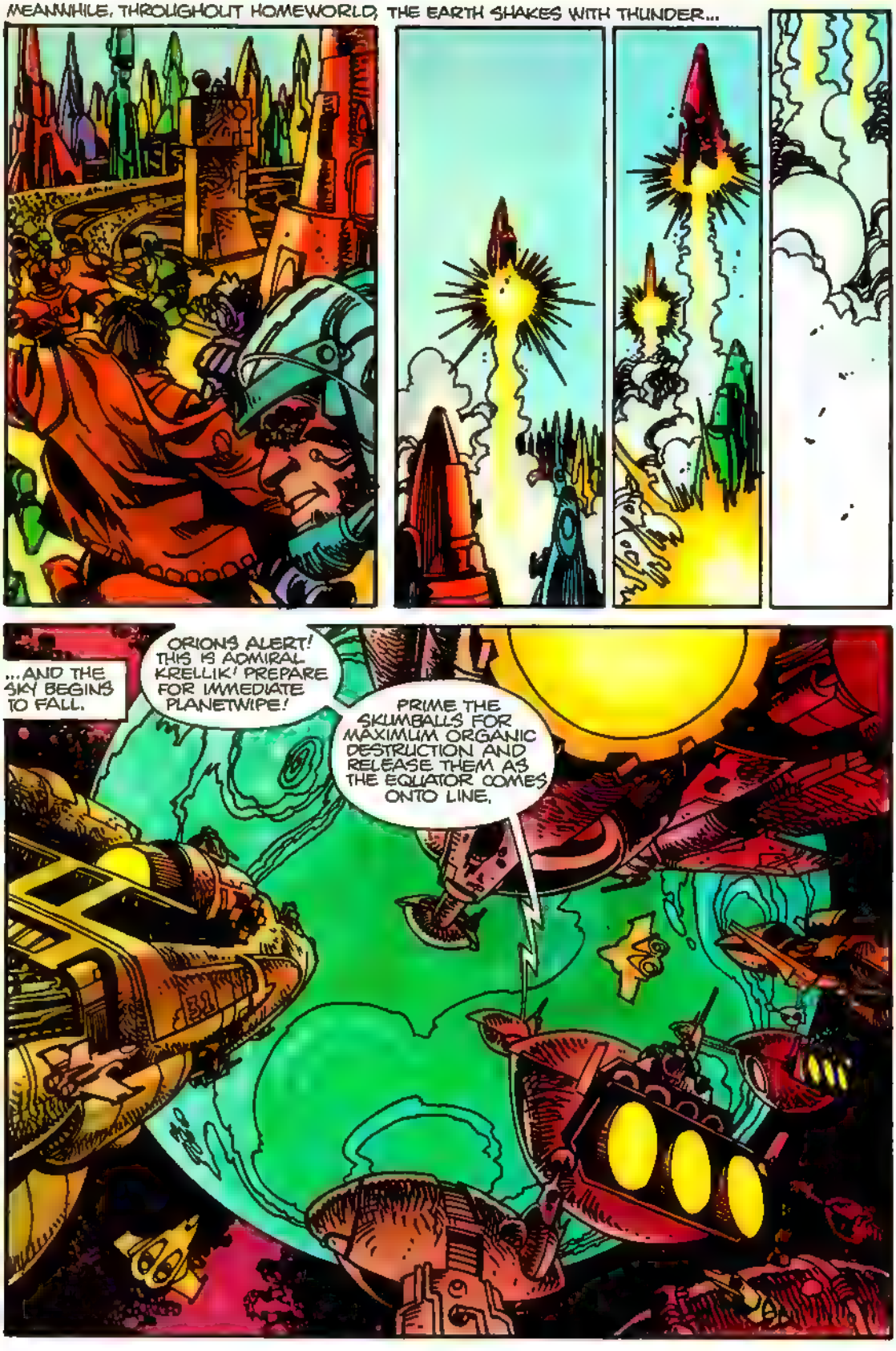


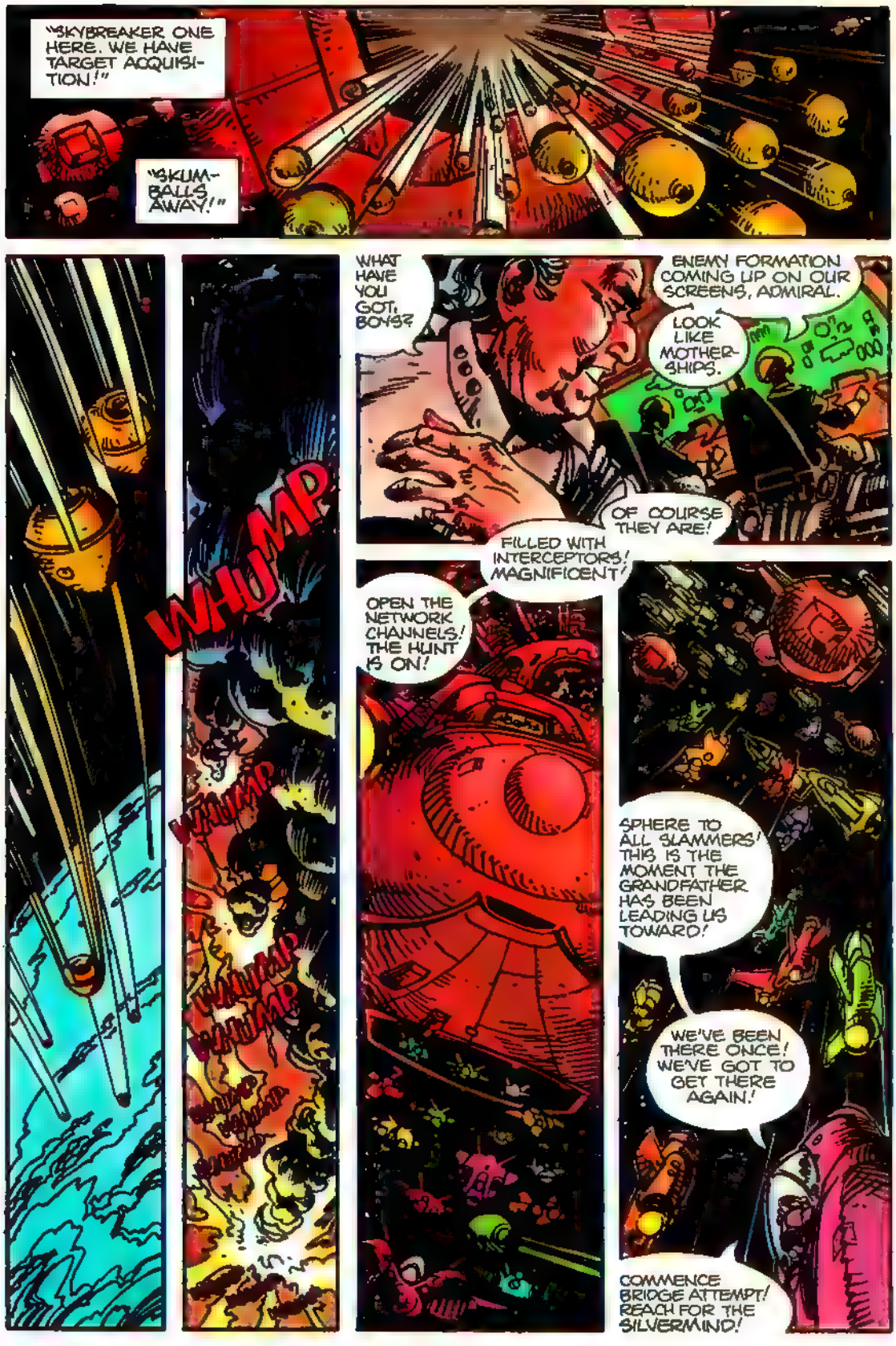
THE TEST OF TRUE MEN WILL SETTLE THAT QUESTION.
WE'LL BURY YOU NEXT TO YOUR SHIP, OLD MAN.
BAASSH!
I PASS THE TEST, I BELIEVE.
NOW LET'S GET DOWN TO BUSINESS.
I'VE COME WITH A WARNING FOR ALL OF YOU.
THE SKY IS FALLING!

...SO YOU SEE, IT WILL TAKE THEM YEARS TO BUILD AND OUTFIT AN ARMADA LARGE ENOUGH FOR PLANET WIPING.
BUT THEY'LL COME.
YOU ARE A HUNTER. WE HAVE RENOUNCED THAT IDENTITY.
WITH YOUR PERMISSION, SIR, LET ME MINDBRIDGE WITH YOU. WE'LL SOON KNOW.
YOU HANDLE A POWER-SLAMMER WELL, GRANDFATHER, BUT CAN WE TRUST YOU?
AS YOU WISH, SPHERE.
HE'S CLEAR.
LET'S GET BACK TO THE VILLAGE. WE'LL HAVE TO SEND OUT THE WORD TO EVERY-BODY.
SOUNDS LIKE WE'VE GOT SOME HEAVY THINKING TO DO.

I'VE HAD A CHANCE TO LOOK AROUND, SPHERE YOU'VE HIDDEN YOUR EXISTENCE WELL...
...BUT IT'LL TAKE MONEY, GUNS, AND GUTS TO SAVE YOURSELVES.
WE'VE GOT THE GUTS, GRANDFATHER. HOW DO WE GET THE REST?
DO WHAT YOU DO BEST. FIGHT. THERE'S ALWAYS GOOD MONEY FOR GOOD FIGHTERS. AND THERE'S ALWAYS FIGHTING SOMEWHERE.
ADVERTISE. START BY FIGHTING CHEAP. YOU'LL BE WRITING YOUR OWN TICKET IN NO TIME.
BE PROVOCATIVE
TAKE A NAME, SAY, FROM YOUR WEAPONS.
CALL YOURSELVES THE STAR SLAMMERS
BUT KEEP YOUR HOME AND ORIGINS SECRET FROM ORION... AND OTHERS
YOU WON'T MAKE MANY FRIENDS IN THAT LINE OF WORK.
WILL WE WIN?
WHO CAN SAY? YOUR ABILITY TO MINDBRIDGE HAS GIVEN ME AN IDEA. WHAT IF THE SLAMMERS COULD BRIDGE TOGETHER.
...INSTEAD OF AS INDIVIDUALS?
ALL THAT RANDOM THOUGHT REMINTED INTO ONE TIGHT BEAM OF CO-ORDINATED INFORMATION.
AN ENTIRE RACE, ACTING AS ONE UNIT.
IT COULD REMAKE HISTORY...

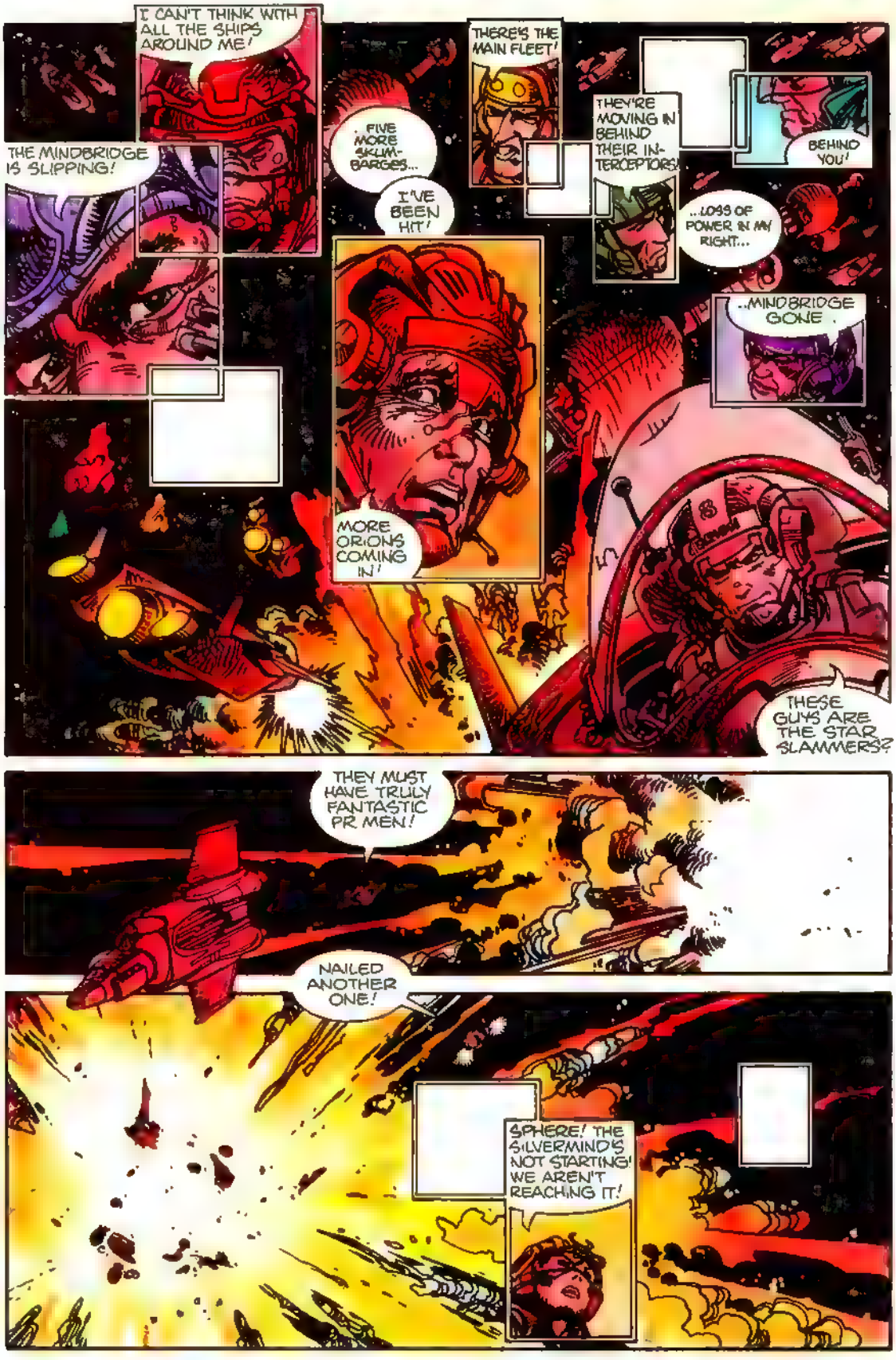
OR PERHAPS NOT
ETHON'S DIED PROVING THE SILVERMIND COULD EXIST. WILL T EXIST WITHOUT H.M? WE'VE ALL BEEN THROUGH MIND BRIDGES WITH YOU, TRIED TO BREAK THE MENTAL BARRIERS THAT KEEP US SEPARATE
WHAT IF WE CAN'T DO IT AGAIN. NOW THAT IT'S OUR LAST HOPE?
THEN YOU WILL HAVE WASTED YOUR FAITH IN ME AT OUR FIRST MEETING, SPHERE. I'M NOT A SLAMMER, ONLY A DISTANT RELATION.
MY INSTRUMENTS AND NEEDLES MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR SLAMMERS TO MINDBRIDGE WITH ME--
--NOTHING ELSE. YOU PUT YOUR ENTIRE WORLD ON THE LINE FOR A HUNCH.
WHY DID YOU TRUST ME?
YOU KNEW ABOUT THE SKY. YOU COULD USE A POWER SLAMMER
THAT WAS WORTH SOMETHING, WASN'T IT?
GENERATIONS AGO, THERE WAS AN ORION WHO WIELDED A DEVASTATING SLAMMER.
"HE WAS WARRIOR CASTE AND STOOD AT THE EMPEROR'S RIGHT HAND.
"HE WAS MY ANCESTOR.
"WHEN HE FELL FROM FAVOR, HE STOOD ON HIS OWN TWO FEET... AND WAS EXILED HERE.
"SLAMMERS HAVE BEEN FORGOTTEN ON ORION. I HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN THEM.
"WHEN I HEARD SENATOR KRELLIK'S TALE, I HAD TO COME, TO SEE WHO WAS WIELDING THE SLAMMER AGAIN. TO FIND, AS THE 'LAY OF THE SLAMMER' SAYS, TRUE MEN."
KLANGKLANGKLANG
I FOUND THEM-- THE TRUE MEN MY PEOPLE HAD LONG CEASED TO BE--
--AND I HELPED THEM AS BEST I COULD.
NOW I CAN DIE IN PEACE.
YOU KNOW, GRANDFATHER, IT'S NOT THE DYING I FEAR. IT'S THE LOSING.

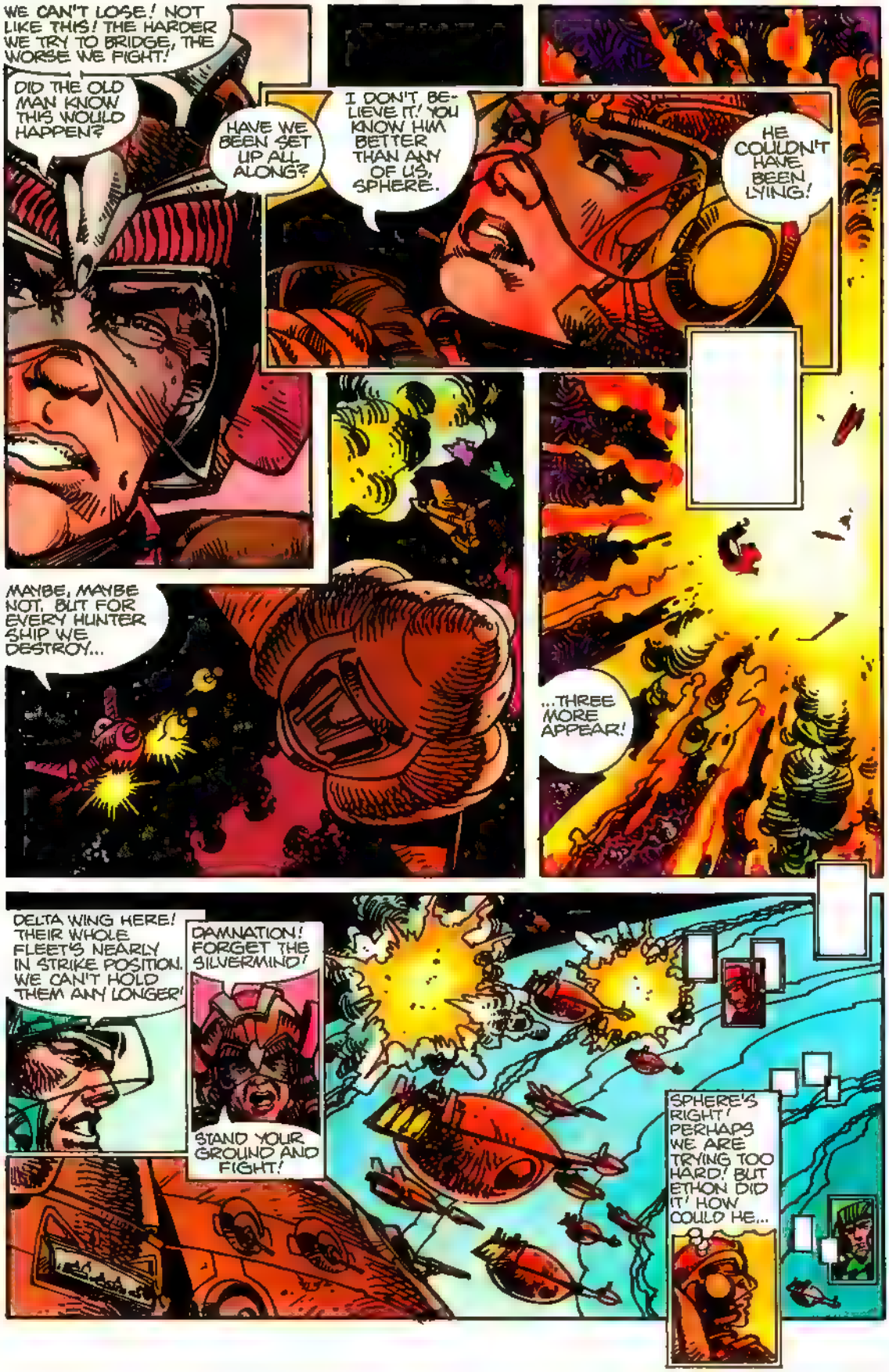

MEANWHILE, THROUGHOUT HOMEWORLD, THE EARTH SHAKES WITH THUNDER...
...AND THE SKY BEGINS TO FALL.
ORION9 ALERT! THIS IS ADMIRAL KRELLIK! PREPARE FOR IMMEDIATE PLANETWIPE!
PRIME THE SKUMBALLS FOR MAXIMUM ORGANIC DESTRUCTION AND RELEASE THEM AS THE EQUATOR COMES ONTO LINE.

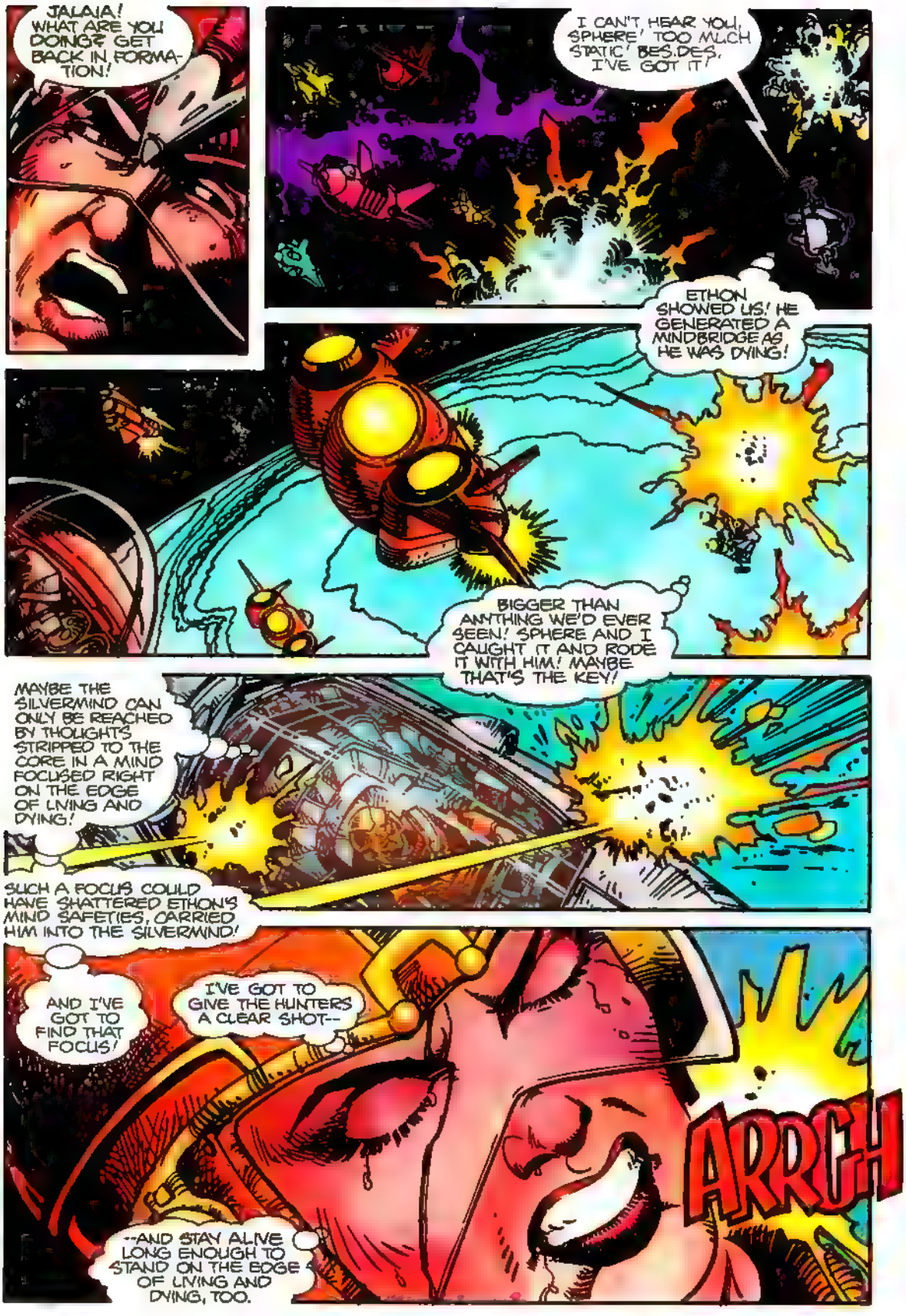

"SKYBREAKER ONE HERE. WE HAVE TARGET ACQUISITION!"
"SKUM-BALLS AWAY!"
WHUMP
WHUMP
WHUMP
WHUMP
WHUMP
WHUMP
WHAT HAVE YOU GOT, BOYS?
ENEMY FORMATION COMING UP ON OUR SCREENS, ADMIRAL.
LOOK LIKE MOTHER-SHIPS.
OF COURSE THEY ARE!
FILLED WITH INTERCEPTORS! MAGNIFICENT!
OPEN THE NETWORK CHANNELS! THE HUNT IS ON!
SPHERE TO ALL SLAMMERS! THIS IS THE MOMENT THE GRANDFATHER HAS BEEN LEADING US TOWARD!
WE'VE BEEN THERE ONCE! WE'VE GOT TO GET THERE AGAIN!
COMMENCE BRIDGE ATTEMPT! REACH FOR THE SILVERMIND!

JALAIA, CONTACT'S VERY WEAK. I'M NOT GETTING ANYTHING MORE THAN FAINT IMPRESSIONS.
I CAN'T FEEL THE SILVER-MIND BRIDGE AT ALL!
NEITHER CAN I. BUT WE DID IT BEFORE.
FOCUS YOUR THOUGHTS ON MINE!
THIS IS SLAMMER WING THREE. WE'VE GOT A SKUM-BARGE IN RANGE.
BEGINNING INTERCEPTION.
NICE SHOT, TAGGER...

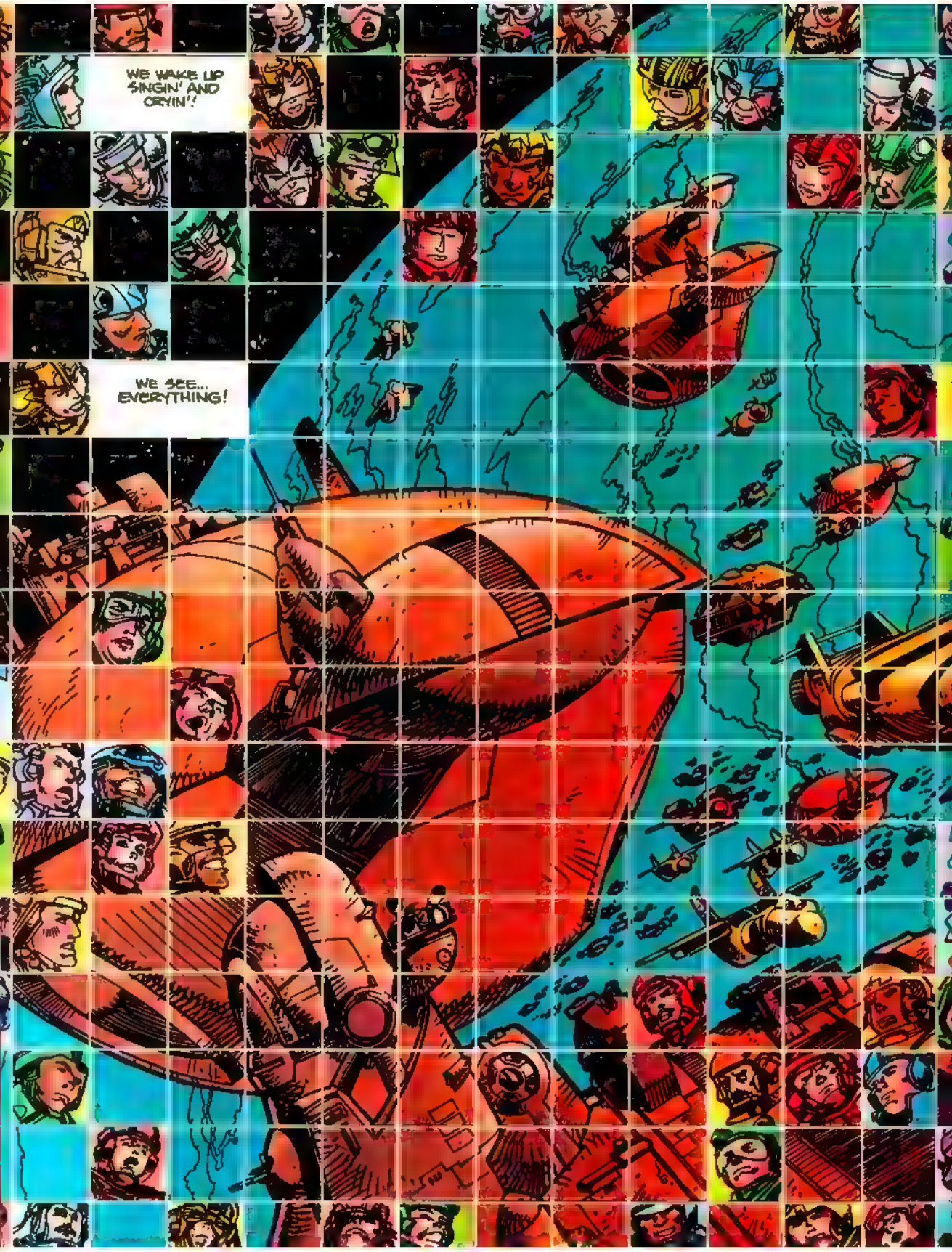
...BUT I CAN'T HOLD CONTACT!
NEITHER CAN I. THE EXPLOSION'S BREAKING MY CONCENTRATION!
TRY TO MAIN-TAIN ..
I'M LOSING THE BRIDGE...
ANOTHER SKUMBARGE...
I'VE GOT HIM TAR-GETED!
MISSED!
BANDITS, THREE O'CLOCK HIGH.
JALAIA?
TROUBLE, SPHERE. THE ORIONS HAVE RELEASED THEIR IN-TERCEPTORS.
THEY'RE ALL OVER MY SCREENS!

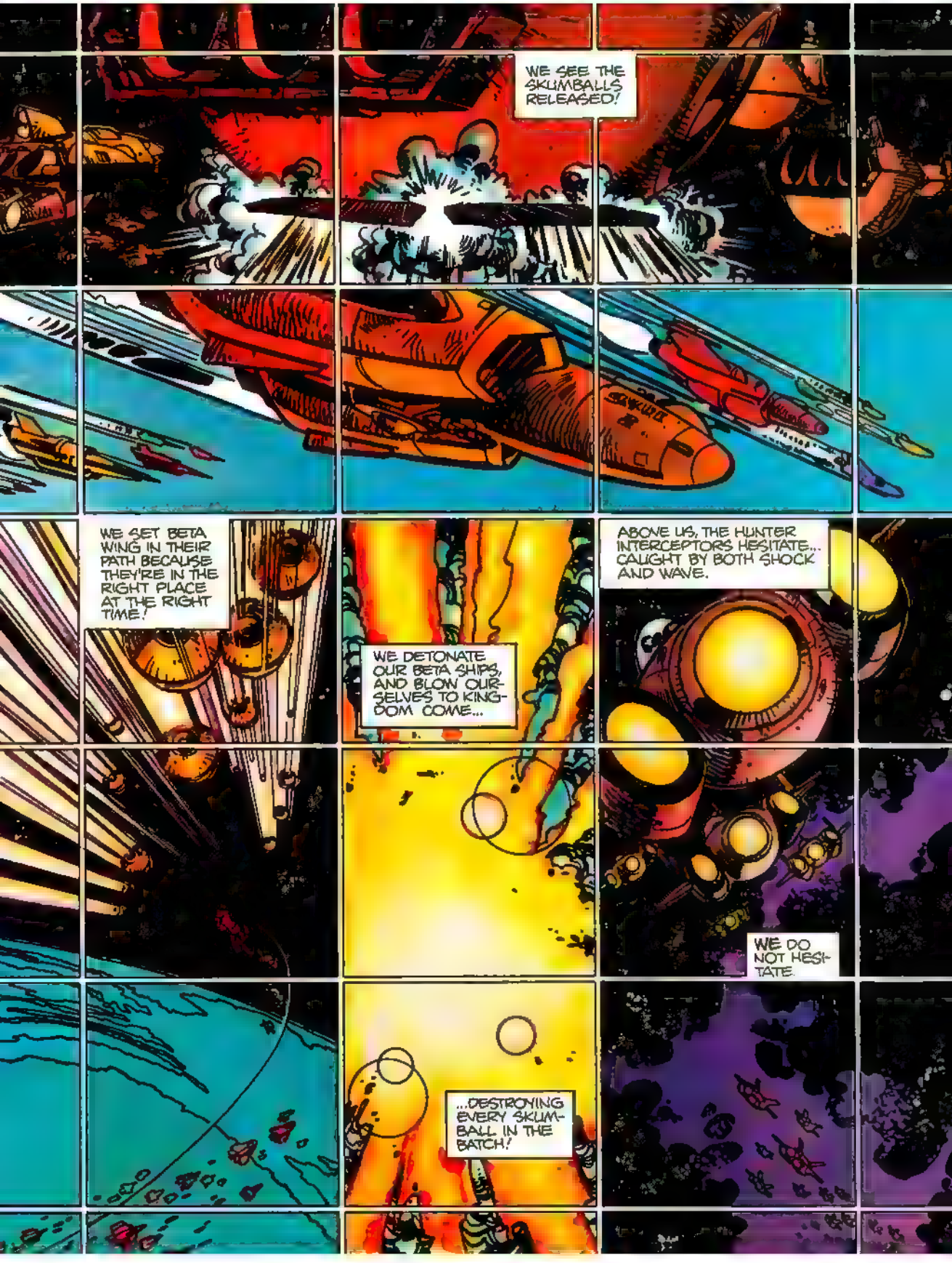

I CAN'T THINK WITH ALL THE SHIPS AROUND ME!
THE MINDBRIDGE IS SLIPPING!
. FIVE MORE SKUM-BARGES...
I'VE BEEN HIT!
MORE ORIONS COMING IN!
THERE'S THE MAIN FLEET!
THEY'RE MOVING IN BEHIND THEIR IN-TERCEPTORS!
BEHIND YOU!
...LOSS OF POWER IN MY RIGHT...
..MINDBRIDGE GONE .
THESE GUYS ARE THE STAR SLAMMERS?
THEY MUST HAVE TRULY FANTASTIC PR MEN!
NAILED ANOTHER ONE!
SPHERE! THE SILVERMIND'S NOT STARTING! WE AREN'T REACHING IT!

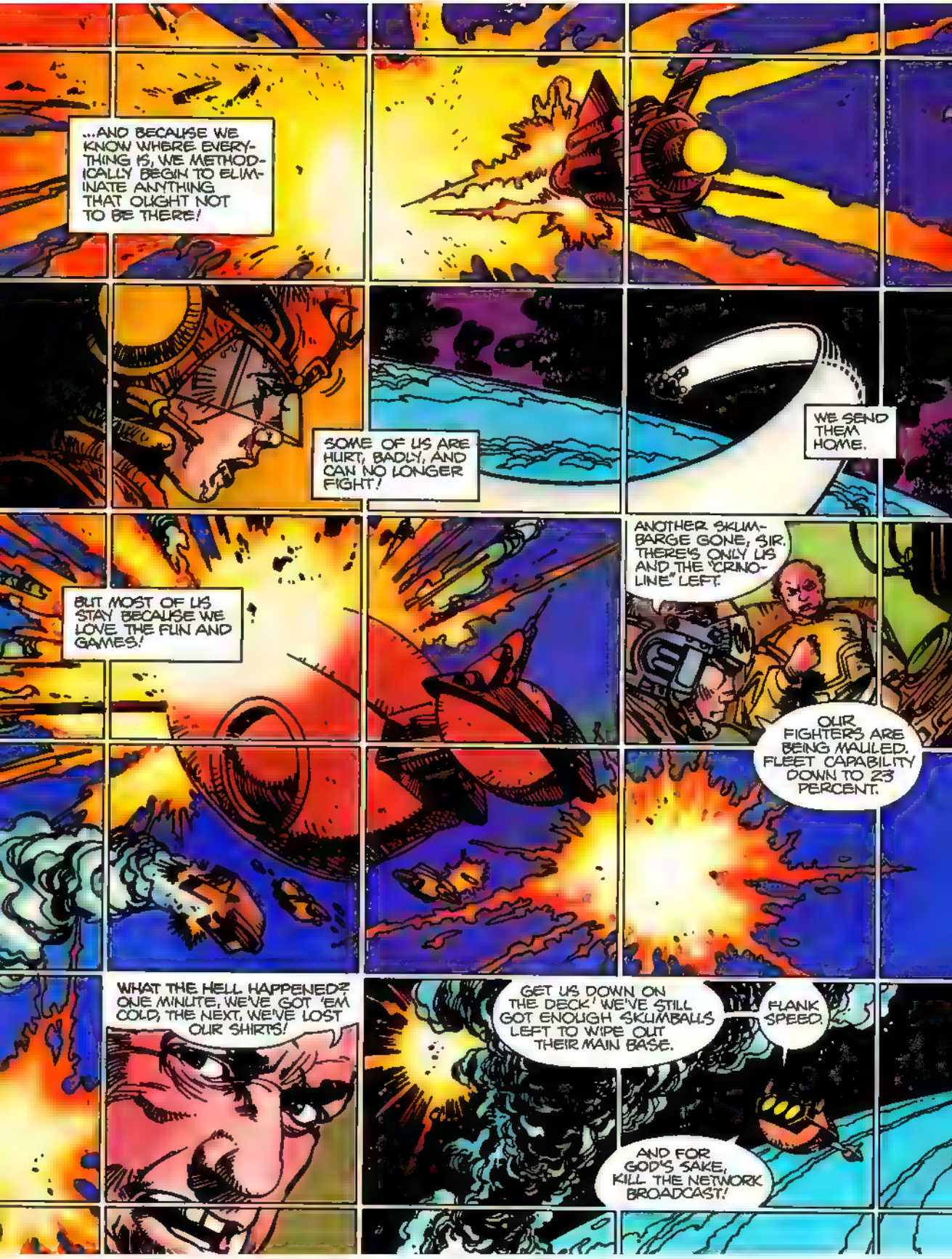

WE CAN'T LOSE! NOT LIKE THIS! THE HARDER WE TRY TO BRIDGE, THE WORSE WE FIGHT!
DID THE OLD MAN KNOW THIS WOULD HAPPEN?
HAVE WE BEEN SET UP ALL ALONG?
I DON'T BELIEVE IT! YOU KNOW HIM BETTER THAN ANY OF US, SPHERE.
HE COULDN'T HAVE BEEN LYING!
MAYBE, MAYBE NOT. BUT FOR EVERY HUNTER SHIP WE DESTROY...
...THREE MORE APPEAR!
DELTA WING HERE! THEIR WHOLE FLEET'S NEARLY IN STRIKE POSITION. WE CAN'T HOLD THEM ANY LONGER!
DAMNATION! FORGET THE SILVERMIND!
STAND YOUR GROUND AND FIGHT!
SPHERE'S RIGHT! PERHAPS WE ARE TRYING TOO HARD! BUT ETHON DID IT! HOW COULD HE...

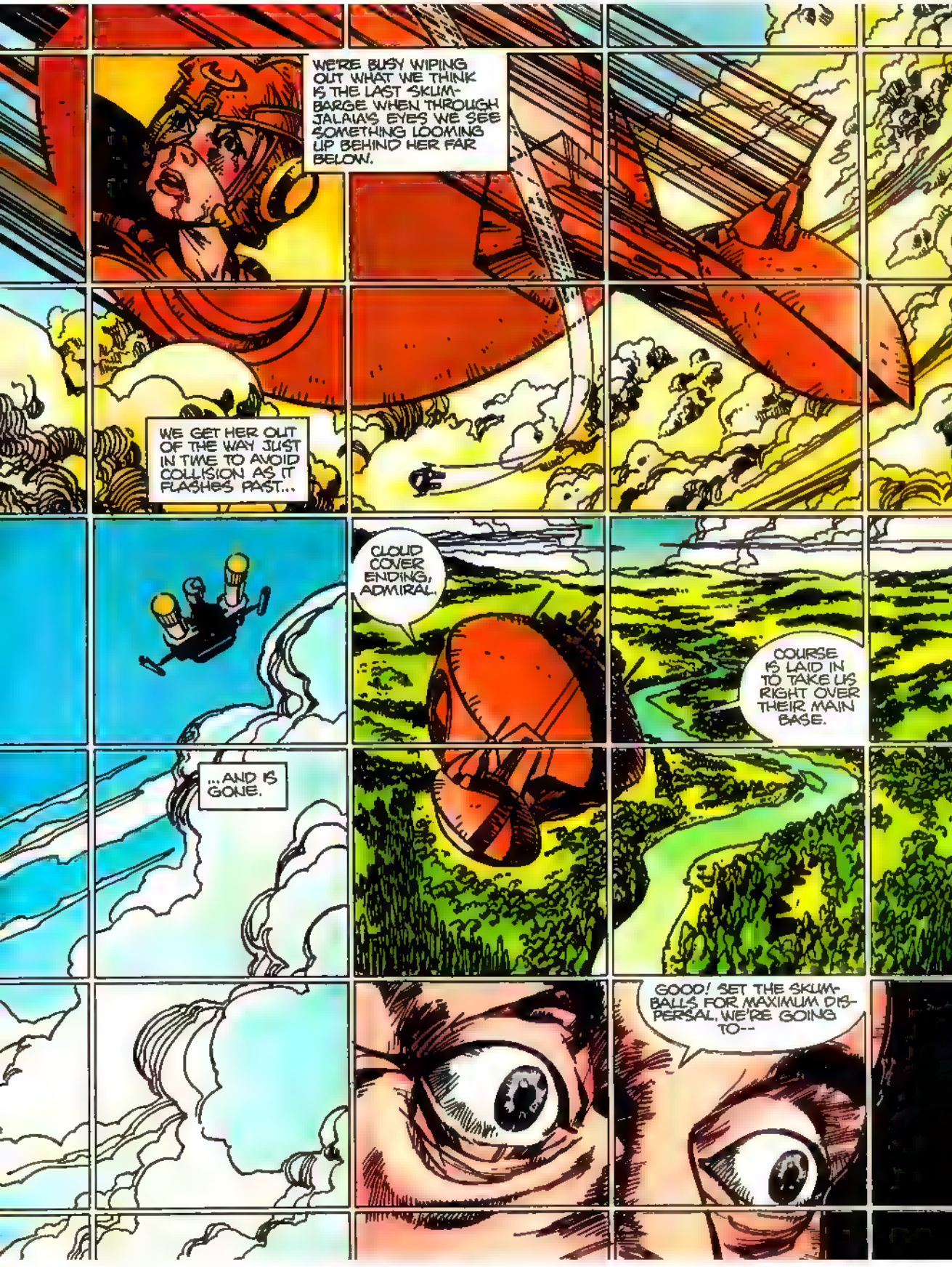

JALAIA! WHAT ARE YOU DOING? GET BACK IN FORMATION!
I CAN'T HEAR YOU, SPHERE! TOO MUCH STATIC! BES.DES, I'VE GOT IT!
ETHON SHOWED US! HE GENERATED A MINDBRIDGE AS HE WAS DYING!
BIGGER THAN ANYTHING WE'D EVER SEEN! SPHERE AND I CAUGHT IT AND RODE IT WITH HIM! MAYBE THAT'S THE KEY!
MAYBE THE SILVERMIND CAN ONLY BE REACHED BY THOUGHTS STRIPPED TO THE CORE IN A MIND FOCUSED RIGHT ON THE EDGE OF LIVING AND DYING!
SUCH A FOCUS COULD HAVE SHATTERED ETHON'S MIND SAFETIES, CARRIED HIM INTO THE SILVERMIND!
AND I'VE GOT TO FIND THAT FOCUS!
I'VE GOT TO GIVE THE HUNTERS A CLEAR SHOT--
ARRGH
--AND STAY ALIVE LONG ENOUGH TO STAND ON THE EDGE OF LIVING AND DYING, TOO.

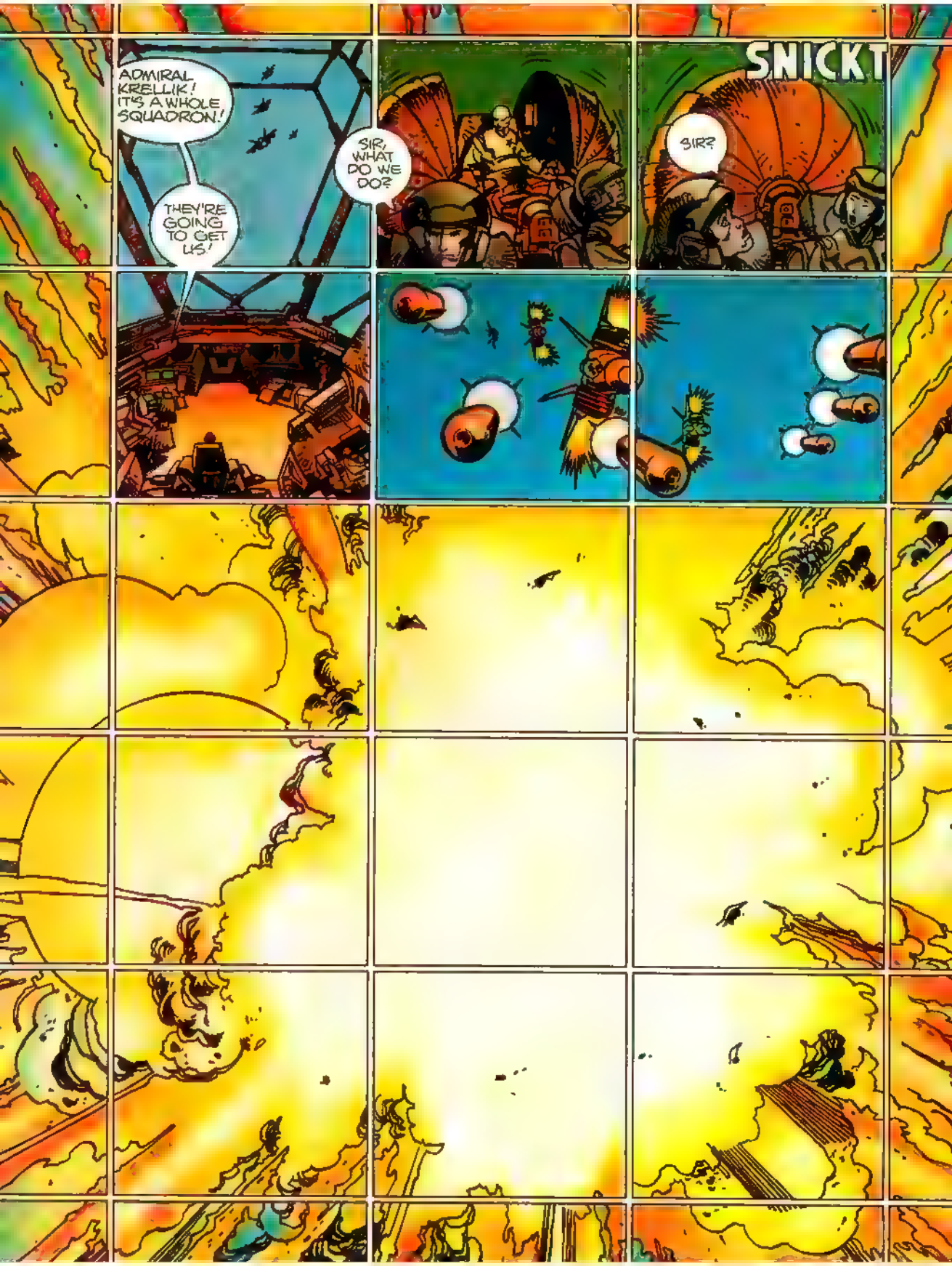
CAN'T HOLD ON MUCH LONGER.
BUT I DON'T FEEL THE SILVER-MIND. WHY ISN'T IT HAPPENING?
ETHON! IF ONLY YOU...
SALUTATIONS, MIGHTY WARRIORS!
I WANTED TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO GREET YOU ALL BEFORE THE LAST OF YOU IS GONE! I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR THIS MOMENT FOR YEARS, YOU DOGS!
I SWORE I'D RETURN AND DEAL WITH YOU FOR WHAT YOU DID TO ME!
LOOK UPON ME NOW AND SEE YOUR DESTRUCTION WRITTEN IN MY FACE!...
...THE HUNTER WHO OBLITERATED THE VAUNTED STAR SLAMMERS!
ETHON! IT'S HIM!
THE ONE WHO SLEW YOUR PARENTS!
IT'S KRELLIK!

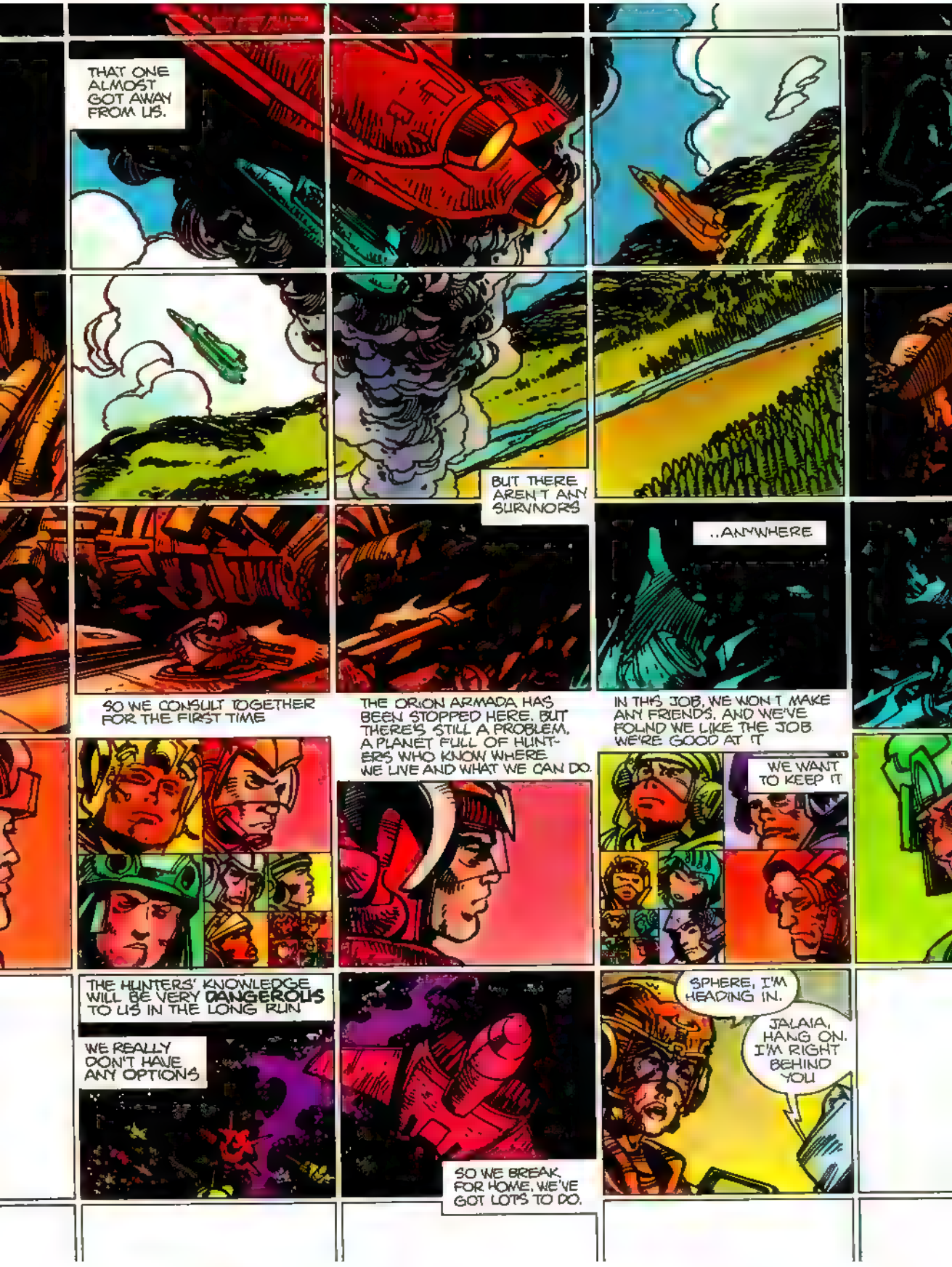

WE WAKE UP SINGIN' AND CRYIN'!
WE SEE... EVERYTHING!

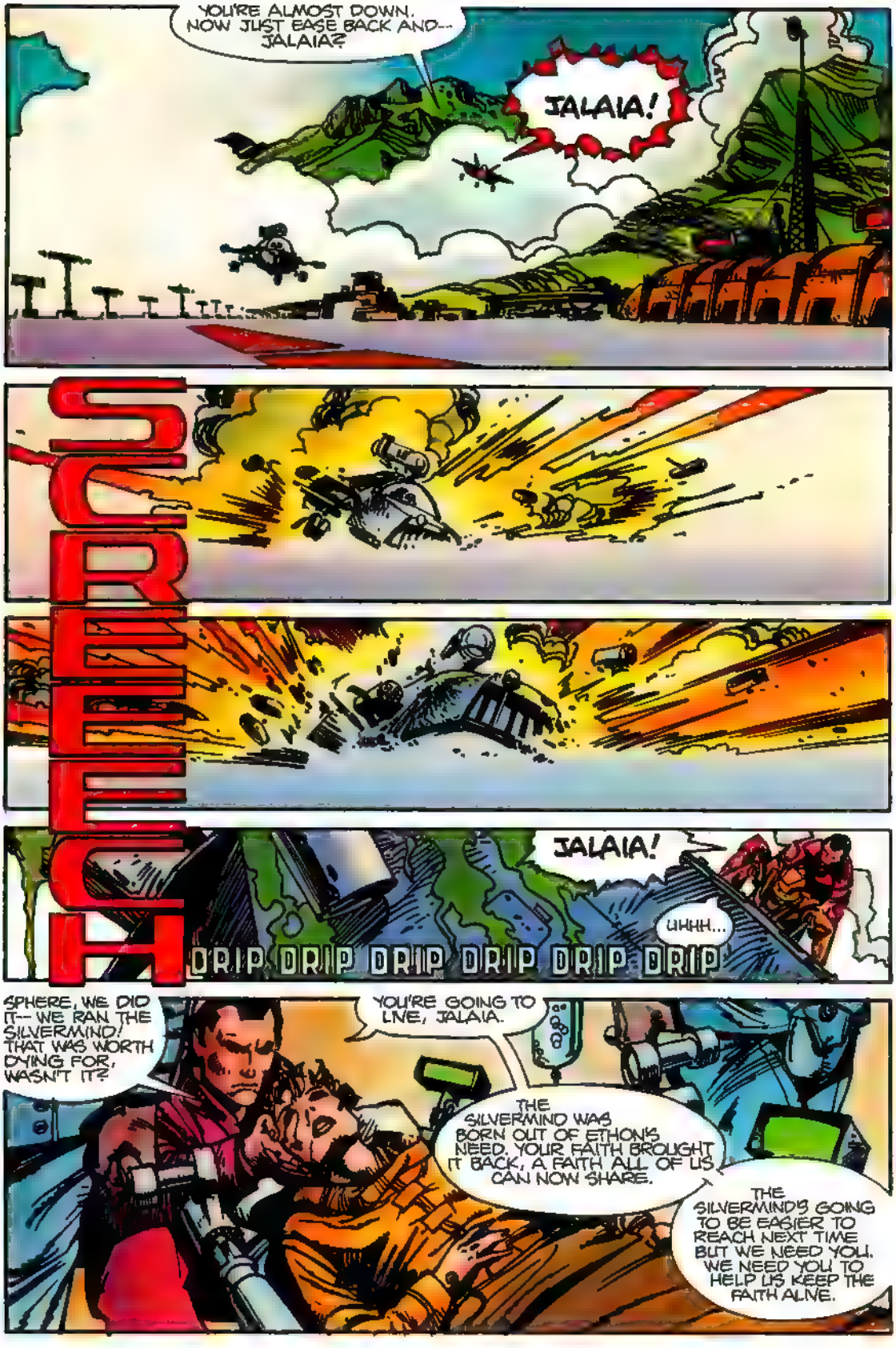

WE SEE THE SKUMBALLS RELEASED!
WE SET BETA WING IN THEIR PATH BECAUSE THEY'RE IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME!
WE DETONATE OUR BETA SHIPS, AND BLOW OURSELVES TO KINGDOM COME...
ABOVE US, THE HUNTER INTERCEPTORS HESITATE... CAUGHT BY BOTH SHOCK AND WAVE.
WE DO NOT HESITATE.
...DESTROYING EVERY SKUMBALL IN THE BATCH!


...AND BECAUSE WE KNOW WHERE EVERYTHING IS, WE METHODICALLY BEGIN TO ELIMINATE ANYTHING THAT OUGHT NOT TO BE THERE!
SOME OF US ARE HURT, BADLY, AND CAN NO LONGER FIGHT!
WE SEND THEM HOME.
BUT MOST OF US STAY BECAUSE WE LOVE THE FUN AND GAMES!
ANOTHER SKUMBARGE GONE, SIR. THERE'S ONLY US AND THE "CRINOLINE" LEFT.
OUR FIGHTERS ARE BEING MAULED. FLEET CAPABILITY DOWN TO 23 PERCENT.
WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED? ONE MINUTE, WE'VE GOT 'EM COLD, THE NEXT, WE'VE LOST OUR SHIRTS!
GET US DOWN ON THE DECK! WE'VE STILL GOT ENOUGH SKUMBALLS LEFT TO WIPE OUT THEIR MAIN BASE.
FLANK SPEED.
AND FOR GOD'S SAKE, KILL THE NETWORK BROADCAST!


WE'RE BUSY WIPING OUT WHAT WE THINK IS THE LAST SKUM-BARGE WHEN THROUGH JALAIA'S EYES WE SEE SOMETHING LOOMING UP BEHIND HER FAR BELOW.
WE GET HER OUT OF THE WAY JUST IN TIME TO AVOID COLLISION AS IT FLASHES PAST...
CLOUD COVER ENDING, ADMIRAL.
COURSE IS LAID IN TO TAKE US RIGHT OVER THEIR MAIN BASE.
...AND IS GONE.
GOOD! SET THE SKUM-BALLS FOR MAXIMUM DIS-PERSAL. WE'RE GOING TO--


ADMIRAL KRELLIK! IT'S A WHOLE SQUADRON!
THEY'RE GOING TO GET US!
SIR, WHAT DO WE DO?
SNICKT
SIR?

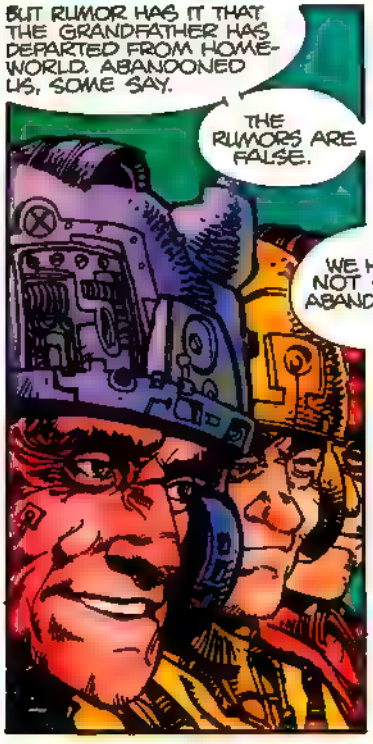

THAT ONE ALMOST GOT AWAY FROM US.
BUT THERE AREN'T ANY SURVIVORS
..ANYWHERE
SO WE CONSULT TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME
THE ORION ARMADA HAS BEEN STOPPED HERE. BUT THERE'S STILL A PROBLEM. A PLANET FULL OF HUNTERS WHO KNOW WHERE WE LIVE AND WHAT WE CAN DO.
IN THIS JOB, WE WON'T MAKE ANY FRIENDS. AND WE'VE FOUND WE LIKE THE JOB WE'RE GOOD AT IT
WE WANT TO KEEP IT
THE HUNTERS' KNOWLEDGE WILL BE VERY DANGEROUS TO US IN THE LONG RUN
WE REALLY DON'T HAVE ANY OPTIONS
SO WE BREAK FOR HOME. WE'VE GOT LOTS TO DO.
SPHERE, I'M HEADING IN.
JALAIA, HANG ON. I'M RIGHT BEHIND YOU

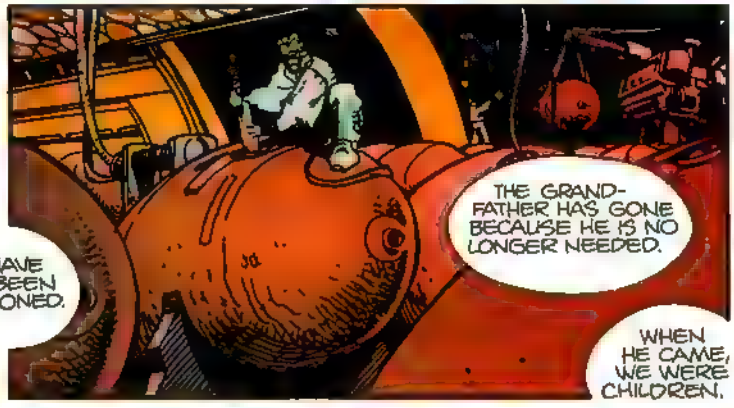

YOU'RE ALMOST DOWN. NOW JUST EASE BACK AND-- JALAIA?
JALAIA!
SILVERMIND
JALAIA!
UHHH...
DRIP DRIP DRIP DRIP DRIP DRIP
SPHERE, WE DID IT-- WE RAN THE SILVERMIND! THAT WAS WORTH DYING FOR, WASN'T IT?
YOU'RE GOING TO LIVE, JALAIA.
THE SILVERMIND WAS BORN OUT OF ETHON'S NEED. YOUR FAITH BROUGHT IT BACK, A FAITH ALL OF US CAN NOW SHARE.
THE SILVERMIND'S GOING TO BE EASIER TO REACH NEXT TIME BUT WE NEED YOU. WE NEED YOU TO HELP US KEEP THE FAITH ALIVE.

IT IS NEARLY SUNDOWN BY THE TIME SPHERE REACHES HIS DESTINATION!
GRANDFATHER?
grandfather?

CLIK
SPHERE, I KNOW YOU WILL COME BACK WHEN YOU ARE FINISHED. JUST AS I KNOW WHAT YOU WILL HAVE COME TO TELL ME.
I AM WARRIOR CASTE, SPHERE. I NEEDED TO KNOW TRUE MEN.
I FOUND THEM. THEY BECAME MY CHILDREN. NOW, THEY WILL BECOME ADULTS BY SLAYING THEIR GREATEST ENEMY--MY PEOPLE.
THEY WILL DO THIS USING THE NAME AND THE WEAPON I HAVE PUT INTO THEIR HANDS
BUT I AM STILL A HUNTER AND NO MAN SHOULD BE WITHOUT HIS PEOPLE.
BE WORTHY OF THE GREAT POWER IN YOUR HANDS, MY CHILDREN.
BE WELL, MY SON.
CLIK

ATTEN--SHUN!
BEFORE WE EMBARK, I'D LIKE TO SAY A FEW WORDS. THESE LAST WEEKS, WE'VE BEEN PREPARING FURIOUSLY FOR THE COMING ASSAULT ON ORION
NOW, WE ARE READY.


BUT RUMOR HAS IT THAT THE GRANDFATHER HAS DEPARTED FROM HOME-WORLD. ABANDONED US, SOME SAY.
THE RUMORS ARE FALSE.
WE HAVE NOT BEEN ABANDONED.


THE GRAND-FATHER HAS GONE BECAUSE HE IS NO LONGER NEEDED.
WHEN HE CAME, WE WERE CHILDREN.

HE TAUGHT US TO GROW.

AND WITH THAT LESSON, HIS WORK HERE WAS FINISHED. HE HAS DEPARTED TO FIND OTHER CHILDREN WHO NEED HIM AS WE ONCE DID.
BUT HE HAS LEFT BEHIND HIS BLESSING.

HE HAS ENJOINED US TO BE WORTHY OF HIM.
HE HAS PUT INTO OUR HANDS THE WEAPON OF OUR EVENTUAL VICTORY.
HE HAS GIVEN US OUR NAME.
LET EVERY ONE AMONG US REMEMBER THIS...
...WE ARE THE CHILDREN OF HIS CHOICE.
WE MUST BECOME THE TRUE MEN OF HIS HEART!
SLAMMERS! ORION AWAITS!

ONCE UPON A TIME, THERE WAS A RACE OF MEN WHO COULD OUT-SHOOT, OUT-FIGHT, AND OUT-KILL ANYBODY. THEY WERE PAID FABULOUS SUMS TO ACT AS MERCENARIES. THE PRACTICE BECAME SO LUCRATIVE, THEY DECIDED TO GO INTO BUSINESS. THEY BECAME THE MOST SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSMEN IN HISTORY, AND THEY CALLED THEMSELVES...

THE STAR SLAMMERS

THIS ONE'S FOR MY FOLKS, WHO ENCOURAGED ME EVERY STEP OF THE WAY.

Walter

Once upon a time, there was a race of men
who could out-shoot, out-fight,
and out-kill anybody. They were paid fabulous
sums to act as mercenaries.
The practice became so lucrative, they decided
to go into business. They became
the most successful businessmen in history,
and they called themselves...

THE STAR SLAMMERS